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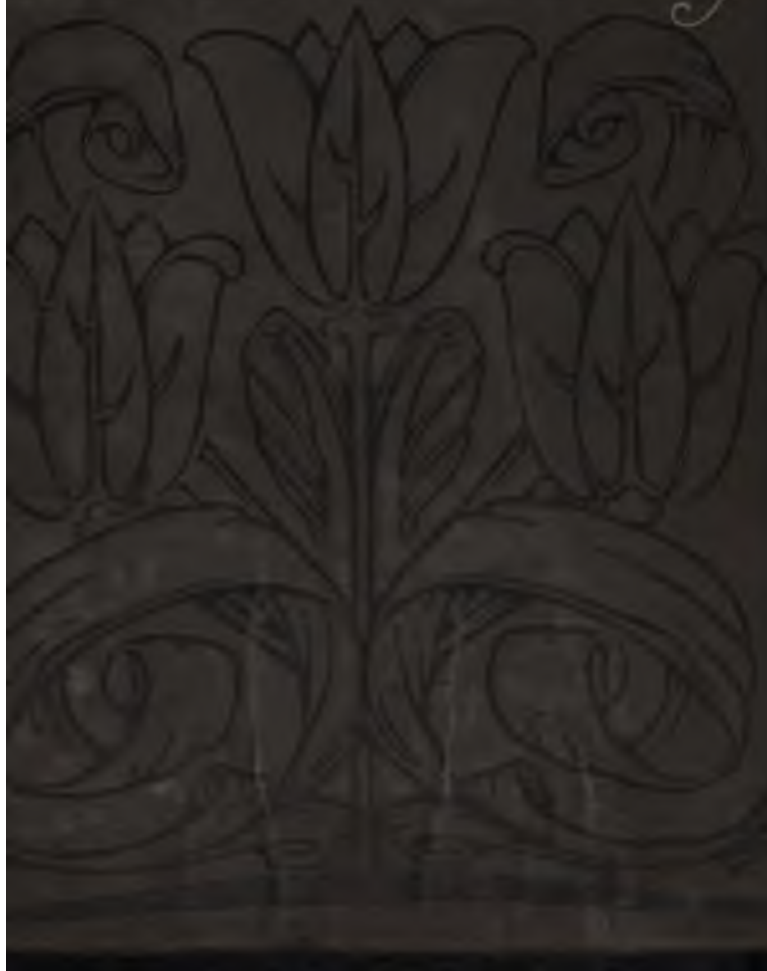


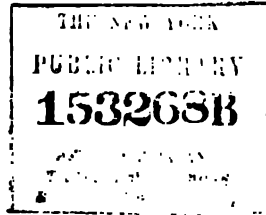
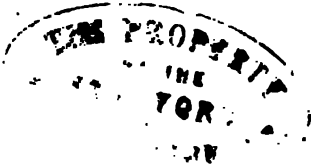
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DADDY'S EPISODES

by

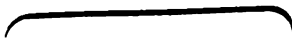
Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney





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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MRS. FORSYTHE'S CHICKEN	1
II. JOLLYING THE RECTOR	10
III. WRECKS AND IMPS	21
IV. A DOG DECALOGUE	31
V. STEP-RELATIONS	49
VI. IN AN ELECTRIC	56
VII. A GLORIOUS STUNT	69
VIII. A WORD THAT STRUCK	83
IX. DO THEY KNOW? DO THEY CARE?	92
X. ARE N'T YOU AFRAID?	99
XI. TRAIN TALK	109
XII. JACOB AND ESAU	120
XIII. MARIA BRIGGS: AND MRS. LIPPITT	129
XIV. MISS JOANNA! IT'S YOU!	150
XV. SCRAPS AND HINTS	161
XVI. RESEARCHING	171
XVII. INNOCUOUS IGNORANCE	191
XVIII. ON STILTS	200
XIX. UNCLE GEOFFREY IS A BRICK	216
XX. IN THE NORTH STAR LIGHT	226
XXI. THE HIGHWAY HORROR	242
XXII. DAUGHTERING	256
XXIII. DRIFTWOOD	273
XXIV. FINE: AND FIT	288
XXV. CABLEGRAMS — AND TABLE-TIPS	299
XXVI. UNCLE GEOFF TAKES THE RISK	308
XXVII. SO'S A HEN	313
POSTSCRIPT	323

BIDDY'S EPISODES

I

MRS. FORSYTHE'S CHICKEN

I AM an old maid, and I glory in it. Do you, however, properly understand what an old maid is?

Perhaps I had better explain. Who can explain better than the old maid herself?

She is a feminine human creature who has grasped her youth to her heart and let the waves of the years break over her without letting the youngness go. She is a person always young, because from her the freshness of hope has never departed. I mean the hope of the future good and perfect thing that is each soul's birthright, and that never fails of coming, whatever may be the apparent delay. I do not mean any such forlorn and trivial hope as the hope of ordinary marriage for its name and sake.

An old maid is one to whom life is still promise; whom it has not disappointed and

can never disappoint. If she ever thought for a little troublesome while that it was otherwise, she got over that long ago. She turned over a new leaf, and she knows there is no end of new leaves to be turned over.

She lives, not in a resigned, apathetic calm, forced and borne down upon her, but in a persistent glad realizing and anticipation. She has inherited the earth, and all the love and beauty in it. It is hers the more, not the less, because she has never appropriated any one sole, narrow little corner. Not that all corners are narrow and shut away. *Altro*. But corners have a tendency to close their lines in a point.

An old maid stands in the middle of a great room, and looks into all the corners, and beyond. She sees through wide windows. She is aware of open doors, that sometimes fold back against the corners, and bar them rigorously. To her they are free and invite her forth. This holding of her freedom keeps her maiden to the world. Any other kind of old unmarried woman may be called what you please, but she is not the sweet, happy, perennial old maid.

I, Joanna Gainsworth, claim to be an old



maid according to this interpretation. I am well on in my forties, but I am carrying my 'teens along into my 'ties. Living has n't grown tiresome to me. Everything has n't happened to me yet, or to anybody else; and as long as I am among a great many bodies else and they are all living lives that I can care for and borrow experience from, why have n't I got the earth? I don't feel left out, nor cheated of my share, the least little bit.

The world is a pretty place, and I like the spot I am set down in. My home is a little cottage house with only two or three acres of ground around it. But like my life, it is just as full as it can be. There 's the orchard, away back, and the vegetable garden next, and the flower beds come up from that almost to the kitchen door and windows; and at the front are shrubs and vines, — all shades of pretty greens in trees and bushes, and a great bower of clematis over the front porch. When it is in bloom everybody who goes by stops to look at it. Down below the orchard the brook runs by, and over beyond that are woods. They don't belong to me, but nobody owns more of them than I do. Over

their tops I see the sun rise, and out front I look across an open field the other side of the road and have a great patch of the sunset that is nobody's else exactly in the same way that it is mine. I stretch out east and west upon the globe, and all round the compass into all sorts of human interests and sympathies. I am a natural-born expansionist.

All this begins a little bit of a story. I could tell a good many, but one at a time will do.

I went out at my back door one morning for a look into my garden. My sweet peas were beginning to blossom, and there was a great oval bed of nasturtiums, golden and brown and sweet pale primrose color, sending up new-kindled flames here and there from among cool, deep green masses of fan-like leaves.

Martha Blunt, my working housekeeper, sat in her red rocking-chair on the gravel sweep under the shadow of a great elm that dominates its upper end but leaves the flower beds free to the morning sun until it has climbed well up over its crown toward the meridian. A basket of potatoes was at Martha's feet, from which she was picking

out the best for paring, to be laid into cold water until time to cook for dinner.

I stood a minute beside her, and then stepped past her down the footpath in the grass that skirted the gardens. And there I met, full in the face, one of Mrs. Forsythe's great gray Plymouth Rock hens, walking deliberately up from among the ridges of the other kind of peas planted for late succession. She lifted her narrow countenance to mine, and winked. Positively and coolly winked, though the act is technically termed nictitating. I reproached her, indeed, in proper phrase.

"You need n't nictitate at me — nor equivocate. The dirt you have scratched up is fresh upon your heels this minute, and the holes are right behind you. If I should wring your neck, and proceed according to legal and domestic custom, I should find autopsic evidence in your crop. So, neck and crop, — and you may think yourself lucky, — out you go from my garden!"

She was still staring, with one claw lifted up, as if in doubt whether, or which way, to take line of march. I stepped back to Martha's basket, and took up a potato.

I really did not select a big one purposely. I took the first that came to hand. It was big, and knobby, and sprouty. They were old potatoes, which was why Martha was so particular with them. I flung the vegetable at the Plymouth Rock, who probably at the instant was nictitating again, placidly abiding her time. Her time came. Who says a woman can't throw so as to hit anything? She can, if she does n't stop to calculate. I just threw that potato in a general way, and it hit the biddy right in the head. Instead of an erect, audacious, quietly defiant marauder, a heap of feathers tumbled in the path.

"You've done it now," remarked Martha Blunt, serene in her own innocence, though I knew she had sent erratic stones many a time after garden thieves and backyard strays until they were so used to the demonstration that they did not mind; which was possibly the reason my own victim had stood still and derisively winked.

Martha got up and carried her pan of potatoes into the kitchen, and then went off upstairs to sweep, leaving me to my own responsibility. I understood her virtuous de-

light, like that of a child who sees another perpetrate a piece of mischief it had longed itself to do, but either could not or dared not. I resolved to be equal to my own emergency, without help or counsel.

I knew that Mrs. Forsythe thought a great deal of her Plymouth Rocks, as she did, indeed, of everything that was her own. And here was this great gray beauty struck down in the prime of her pride and her usefulness by my most unlucky luck. What was I to do? What explanation, what reparation, could I make? For that I could let it all alone, to explain itself or to remain a mystery, did not for a moment occur to my straightforward habit of mind and action. However involuntarily, I had been guilty of hen-slaughter, if not of fowl murder; and there was the hen, not mine even to bury, so burying my misdeed. She was still good for something, though she lay there, still, and could lay no more.

I went into the kitchen, and got an apron and a basket. I came out, picked up the remains, sat down in Martha's red rocker, and began to pick off the feathers. I worked away carefully till every pin feather was

out and the basket was full of the mottled plumage, while the white, clean creature lay in my lap, a dainty piece of poultry ready for the cook. I tucked the head round under the wing in decent repose. Dead hen is chicken; the great change transmutes. I felt a great deal better; I had handsomely disposed of things, and was about to offer a neighborly service and attention. For I meant to put on my other dress and walk over to the Forsythes' with it myself.

I laid the chicken down in my apron upon the chair-seat and went into the house for a napkin and another basket, in which decorously to bestow the result of my hour's work, voluntary and involuntary. I had to go upstairs for them. When I came down and out into the yard again the red rocking-chair was empty, and *rocking*, as if the occupant had leaped from it into life again and disappeared. I was thunderstruck; but I glanced further just in time to see the vanishing. Mrs. Forsythe's great gray cat was dragging the late great gray Plymouth Rock by the neck off through a hole in the hedge. Long gray tail and long yellow legs

trailed away together into the high field grass beyond.

I stood and gazed for an instant; then I laughed till the tears came that I had not shed before through all the melancholy "particulars." Then I turned round and carried my napkin and basket back where they belonged. I subsided into a reconciled content. "Mrs. Forsythe's cat has got Mrs. Forsythe's chicken," I remarked to myself. "I have nothing more to do with it."

I returned to my own delayed affairs of the morning: my Butterick patterns, by which I was going to cut out a tailor-made cloth suit.

II

JOLLYING THE RECTOR

THE passing of Partlet was a thing of the past. There was one hen less on the roost, and nobody knew where she had gone to. There was no use in my explaining or confessing now, since there was nothing but confession to render up. The world went on with one hen less. That was all. I will not moralize upon that. The reflection is obvious.

There was no blame laid anywhere. Not even the cat was suspected, for they never found any feathers. I suppose they thought she had come to grief through straying, for as the season went on the Forsythe fowls were either shut up or found nearer supply, and my sweet peas and garden seeds had their unmolested way. Of course I never complained; we were simply quits. Very likely somebody else did; I have noticed that in neighborhood matters of the sort if you only keep quiet awhile other people will

make a stir. I would rather they should ; I hate having a grievance. If somebody's dog barks all night, I just lie still and think, " There are folks besides me, and nearer to it, who can't sleep ; it 'll be seen to in time." Of course it would n't do for everybody to say so, and about all sorts of things ; but I think if a good many of the reformers would hold back till it was really their turn to interfere, there might be just as much accomplished in the end, and a good deal of energy and indignation saved. Anyhow, I had done my part so far in what came straight to me to do. There was one hen less to maraud. And probably my piece of history fitted in and helped the result, though it never came publicly to light.

It was not the last I should have to do with the Forsythes.

Biddy Forsythe came home from school that summer — a high-bred Biddy, that had never had her wings clipped. She flew all the fences, and nobody dared to fling a stone. Because, forsooth, she was Biddy Forsythe.

To me she was quite a study in natural history and evolution. I did n't know whether

she was quite odious to me, or whether she interested me to the point of a half liking. It was the same uncertainty in the general mind, I think, which was her immunity. She gave amusement, certainly, to the whole neighborhood, and the properest neighborhood or individual, I suspect, has a repressed vein of mischief and lawlessness which it enjoys indulging by proxy. At any rate, our neighborhood got so that it would have hardly known what to do without Miss Biddy and her vagaries. Her latest escapade was always on people's lips, and there were salt and spice enough in it to keep it fresh and tellable until the next one.

She was awed by nothing and nobody. She recognized no abattis of forbiddance, but walked straight through and took people and things at their heart, assuming that the heart was with her. Nothing succeeds like success, and nothing secures allowance like audacity. She loved dearly to astonish, and was of a marvelous ingenuity in astounding. She was always "jollyng" somebody; the graver the personage, the more daring the prank. Underneath her most absurd little insolences, nevertheless, was

somehow or other a ring of meaning and sincerity which compelled a certain condoning appreciation.

I can imagine how Dr. Christieson looked, raising his brows with a gentle amazement over his spectacle rims, when she entered his study unannounced one morning, finding the door open as she passed down the hall after delivering some errand or message, genuine or invented, to Mrs. Christieson in her sitting-room beyond, and interrupted the Friday's work upon the Sunday sermon, in the very middle of a profound exegesis.

"May I sit down, doctor?" A girlishly sweet voice put the inquiry with an innocent serenity.

"Why, yes, my child, if I can do anything for you, though I was at this other part of my work. I am pastor, you know, as well as preacher. What is it?"

"Well, it's a question. Things are very puzzling sometimes. I want to know, if you can tell me, why all those poor pigs in the New Testament were driven down into the water and drowned. Do you think it was fair? I can't understand."

Something like a smile flickered over the good doctor's calmly serious face. How do I know? By the selfsame little quiver that passed over it as he told me the story some time after. I know all about this interview that is necessary to its reconstruction. I had two versions of it, later, one from each interlocutor. It is curious how many thises and thats one can put together, like Agassiz's fish bones, till one has entire little histories; especially if one is a friendly old maid who is interested and observing, and to whom things are in the habit of drifting.

I know the doctor, and I am sure that he was quite aware of Bidddy's mischief, and that it was not without a little mischief of his own that he met it as simple earnest.

"They were possessed, you know, Miss Bidddy," he told her. "That which had possessed the men 'entered into the swine;' took its natural and representative place, I think, as correspondent to that in the men's nature which it had been able to ally with."

"What is 'possessed,' please?" Her eyebrows went up, and her eyes looked into his, with most ingenuous inquiry.

“Held in control. Dominated in will and action.”

“Some—body,—or—some—thing?” she asked, slowly dividing words and syllables.

“Ah, there you touch the question of personality. I don’t think we know much about that, beyond our own, and the personality that should control.”

“You mean Personality with a capital P?” put the pertinent young woman of very quick discernment. (I may as well say here that the adjective I apply to her is her own, insisted upon for herself when some one had used it of her with the Latin prefix. “I ’m *never impertinent*,” she declared. “I ’m awfully to the point, always. That’s what’s the matter.”)

“I do,” answered the doctor. “Life is just the play and relation between these two,—the absolute and the conferred personality.”

“Where do the pigs come in?”

“Where the conferred personality permits. It has freedom to do that.”

“What for? I ’m glad you treat me as if I could understand. I really do mean something.”

"I always thought there was method in your madness, Miss Biddy."

"Or madness in my method, maybe?"

"That 's for you to discover, and set to rights, — maybe."

I think they were both hugely enjoying their tilt, in different yet hardly conflicting ways.

"I asked you what for?" she persisted. "Why can't the big personality keep the pigs out? Or why does n't it?"

"Unless I were the absolute personality, I could not tell you all the what for. If the child could comprehend the whole scheme of education, it were already educated. What I am sure of is that I myself have got something to do about it, and that there is a power behind and above mine that is mine as far as I will work with it. Those demented men appealed to it."

"I suppose I know what you mean. But all the same it does n't answer the question about those real pigs. They were n't to blame for being pigs."

"No. And the pig-nature is n't to blame. It's in us all ; it is what we are growing up out of. It has to be kept under, and over-

lived. There are degrees and differences even in pig-nature."

"Yes. Some are real clean, cunning, fascinating little things."

"While they are small, perhaps," said the doctor. "But they must n't be let to grow, and devour the whole real life. My little girl, that difficult story is purely representative. And it is so blessedly representative that a few actual swinish lives — that were forbidden at any rate, and must come to slaughter eventually — were well lost. You know those old Hebrews were brought up on types. They were accustomed to sacrifices as signs of spiritual atonement and deliverance. The 'what for' of that is part of the whole mystery of pain and redemption that I cannot pretend to explain to you. The fact which concerns us remains; that the low and evil in the world — the low and evil or even the imperfect, in human nature — is the only habitat for evil or untrue possession or impulse; and that when so possessed or impelled the end is destruction — to the *low, bad thing*, that rushes its own headlong way simply to perish in the great waters. Through whatever bewil-

derment, whatever suffering in the little and the low, that must be the outcome. It is a threat, but it is still more a promise."

Biddy Forsythe sat silent a moment, and then she said, "I should n't think you would dare to preach that."

"Why not?"

"People would think they might run wild while they liked, and have it all drowned out at last."

"If they dared to risk identifying themselves with the wildness and coarseness, and so making it *themselves* that it would have to be they who should be sent forth into the deep. What we have to do, Biddy, — and we all have our share of it to do in the great human regeneration, or development, — is to keep that lower nature apart from the *us*; to range *ourselves*, our real individuality, which is the Christ-personality in us, on the divine side, and to call God's presence to us to command the evil out of us, and send it away from its possession of us, and give us the glad certainty that it is put away from us forever. That was the appeal of the demoniacs, and the Lord answered it with an outward, visible assurance."

"I'm awfully obliged to you, Dr. Christieson," said Bidy Forsythe, with some pretense at her habitual lightness, as she got up to go.

"But she gave me a grasp of the hand that told me a good deal more than the glib words," said Dr. Christieson to me.

If I had heard all this from the two of them more immediately, I might have understood my wayward little neighbor sooner and more fully.

That next Sunday Dr. Christieson preached his great sermon upon the text of the swine. He talked about evolution, and the making of man by himself, backed by the Maker; of what might be either vestiges or degenerations, that we are set to battle with and get rid of, each our share, for the final triumph of humanity; and he told us the grand, inspiring, exulting truth, that evil once turned from and implored against is sent away from us and destroyed both from in and about our lives forever. "I will cast their sins into the depths of the sea," God says concerning his people," he ended in a glad ringing tone, and with head uplifted. "All we have got to do is

to turn round from all meaner possession, — from passion and greed, self-seeking, self-demonstration, the pushing to get foremost and have first feed at the husks and refuse of common vanities and pleasures, from all this swinishness, — and *be* God's people, and be possessed of Him."

"That was a grand sermon, doctor," one of his vestrymen said to him when they came out after the service.

"It was n't more than half mine," said the doctor, with one of his grave smiles. "It was put in my way, — and in the way of something very different that I was preparing to give you."

Biddy Forsythe never opened her lips about it until that later day when we were the friends we came to be, and she began to tell me things that she "had always wanted to tell somebody." "They nearly burst me sometimes," she would say.

But I am greatly anticipating.

III

WRECKS AND IMPS

LONG before I knew of this, Biddy and I had begun with our little aversion, which they say is a good thing to begin with in some cases. I wonder if the repulsion of the wrong ends is n't a pretty sure sign of magnetic relation?

Biddy, like her namesake, began to transgress my boundaries. She took it into her head that across my little orchard from the rear of their own field was a nice short way to get to the village, and as library books, confectionery, Berlin wools and other such things gave her frequent errands, her transits became a very common thing, and seemed establishing an actual right of way.

The Forsythe house stands quite a way back from the road, at the end of a long drive, in its large space of fifteen acres, and the road winds round a considerable distance both above and below my little place, beyond which it takes a right-angled bend to

the village. It is sunny and dusty and commonplace, that way, for a walk, and it is very pretty and comfortable along the bank that overlooks the brook and through the grassy bit of orchard in the shade of my old apple and cherry trees, and Miss Biddy found out the gap in the hedge, and she and her two big dogs used to come careering through as if there were no line of demarcation at all; as indeed it seemed likely there would not be very long if they kept widening the breach by their pushing and trampling as they had begun to do.

Martha Blunt was very indignant. "Hens were nothing to it," she said; for these "four-legged vagrums" rushed promiscuously over garden patches and made wild raids up and down, to the very back door and into the scrap-bucket, and across the grass-plot where she laid out towels and aprons to whiten; and she declared the brutes made a sign of her "things" to "keep off the grass," so carefully did they make point of tracking right over her bleachings.

I was indignant at the intrusive liberty, naturally enough; and my yellow cat, Daffy,

was the most indignant of all. When I saw her one day flash around the kitchen corner and up the tall, lithe stem of the cut-leaf birch that sways past my window, never stopping till she reached the topmost bough, where she clung for dear life while the limber thing drooped under her weight and swung like a pendulum, it was — well, “the *limit*.”

I threw up my window and shouted, “Call off your dogs!” And a cheerful, complaisant voice returned, “Oh, certainly! Rex! Imp! Back, sirs! Here! Down! Lie still!” And in a moment she had them both at her feet, though they had quivered all over with the conflict of forces at the first sound of command to tear themselves away from their ecstatic circling about the tree.

“They would n’t have thought of the cat if she had n’t run up the tree,” I heard the girl say to Martha Blunt, who had forestalled any further expostulation on my part by some forcible remark of her own.

“Take yourselves off now, all three of you, if you please, and let the cat come down!” I heard Martha rejoin, with a great deal of vigor in the “if you please;” and

the three did please ; the young lady moving with a leisurely straightforwardness along the line of her first intent, and her attendants with more or less of lively circumgyration.

The cat, meanwhile, was trembling on the branch. I wondered how she was to come down ; that is apt to be the embarrassment after taking an extreme position of outraged dignity ; but while I wondered, and as the tail of the last dog disappeared over the low wall into the lane that opened to the roadway, straight from the tree-tip to the grass below shot Daffy in one frantic leap of more than twenty feet, and off she bounded, an electrified mass of bristling yellow fur, and vanished like a streak of an aurora.

I made up my mind. Something had got to be done. I sent for a nurseryman and had the hedge filled up at every thinned or broken point. "The biggest, thorniest things you can put there," I told him. "I don't care what they are, or whether they grow. I only want the holes stopped close, and right away."

Between us, we settled on blackberry

canes. I never cared for a same, trim hedge. I like a natural, mixed tangle of bushes and vines better. So I was not sorry that the old buckthorn had begun to die out in spots, and that the Forsythes did not trouble about having it mended. Now I should have variety; blossoms and fruit in summer, and lovely red and bronze leaves in the autumn, beginning next year, I hoped. Meantime I had brambles and brush-sticks stuck in thickly between, — “tempery fillin’,” as Martha Blunt said, — to keep dogs from pushing through, and I possessed my soul in patience.

Not for very long. I had reckoned without my young neighbor’s fertility of resource in carrying a point; also without taking into account an old apple tree that far down on the slope of the orchard leaned over the hedge from the Forsythe side and made a broad saddleback such as children delight to climb and ride.

It was on the morning of the Fourth of July that, having been kept awake during most of the preceding hours since midnight by pistols, cannon, crackers, horns, and sunrise bells, I felt as if midday

had come, as to time, while yet the morning coolness and fragrance were in the air as much as was compatible with gunpowder and smoke ; and after my early breakfast I strolled down the garden to get such respite and freshness as I might.

Somebody, or something, was beforehand with me. Between the intervening trunks and leafage of the orchard I perceived the old apple tree to be either occupied or decorated. There was a fluttering of color, red and white, depending like a banner from where the crooked trunk divided itself in a big crotch and reared into sturdy branches overhanging my own ground, and putting a patch against my eastern sky that blotted out for me many a first bit of sun and moonrise during certain summer weeks. I had sacrificed several of my own trees for my horizon outlook, but I had no jurisdiction over this, and now it brought me fresh offense ; for I saw presently that the red and white were the stripes of a petticoat, and that below the petticoat dangled two neat little feet, swinging carelessly as if signifying, " We have n't quite decided what to do ; we can

light down if we choose; and anyhow, we are in our own right so far."

Of course it was Bidly Forsythe. Was I always to have a Forsythe biddy invading me and my sweet peace?

There were no dogs visible; but I heard her talking to them, and was convinced that they could have followed her if she had chosen to permit; the low croup of the tree was an easy stile for their long legs to leap.

I went down and walked out there to her. She greeted me politely, quite as if welcoming me to her own territory. "I've just found out this beautiful seat," she said. "Do you ever come here? Which of us does it really belong to?"

"Undoubtedly what grows upon your side belongs to you. But if anything drops on my side, it becomes subject to certain rights of mine," I answered.

"Well, I don't mean to drop, this time," she replied coolly. "And the apples are n't ripe yet. How do you like my Fourth of July gown? I thought I'd better celebrate a little — quietly."

I noticed now that above the red and white skirt, — its lines not broad or glaring,

but of quite delicate effect in thin half-inch alternations upon the light summer material, — she wore a shirt waist of dark blue spotted with dots of white.

“I’ve a whole gown of each kind,” she explained, “and it occurred to me that it would be pretty and patriotic to combine them to-day. Of course, I could n’t do it the other way, — Union down, you know.”

I could not help laughing. That was just what she wanted. I began to find out that Miss Biddy Forsythe had a way, by one means or another, of getting her way. But I composed my face to its dignity again as quickly as possible. One may laugh, as one may wink in a photograph, without breaking the continuity of a severe or serious mood. I meant to stand on my severity.

She saw that, and took the initiative.

“Why can’t we be neighborly, Miss Gainsworth?” She put the question with sweetest, most innocent appeal. “This is such a nice cut to the village for me, and I’m sure you’re quite welcome to come up the hill our back way.”

“You know quite well what I object to,” I told her.

“Yes, Rex and Imp. The poor, dear old dogs. They don’t mean any harm.”

“Perhaps not. But I object to wrecks and imps, among my garden beds and after my cat.”

She laughed at my punning. I ought not to have punned. It was interpolating the frivolous again.

“Oh, you quite misunderstand,” she said. “There’s nothing fiendish or maliciously destructive about them, not even their names. They’re Rex and Imperator, that’s all; and for the most part they live up to their rank. ‘Noblesse oblige,’ you know.”

“I would rather not have any kings or emperors in here, however well behaved or under whatever constitutional limits,” I remarked with calm decision.

“It’s ‘no trespassing,’ then, — and no tree-passing. And I’ve got to go all round by the carriage way and the street, with my library books and everything, all summer.” She spoke with an absurd pathos, and started to get to her feet upon her perch.

“I did not say so. I’m perfectly willing that *you* should go across.”

“Oh, you don’t know me, any more than

you do my dogs. I'm worse than they are, when I take freaks, and I take them oftener. I can't tell, myself, what I might happen to do. Besides, I want my escort. Still, I'll think it over. There's generally a way, and things generally occur to me. I've no doubt we can compromise without referring to the Hague Tribunal. Good-by, Miss Gainsworth."

And with that she sprang straight up and danced along the log, the way she had come, and jumped down over the hedge, where her dogs met her with yelps of delight and immense friskings as she took her way streetward behind the boundary.

She had shown me what she could have done, and she had done the thing required. She had had the last word, after all, and had left me *planté là*.

IV

A DOG DECALOGUE

“I SHOULD fairly admire to know what in the created world that jadehopper is up to now,” quoth Martha Blunt as she came down from her upstairs work a few mornings later. “I’ve tracked her round and back and acrost, and I can’t make out end nor object to it. She’s got on her Hail Columbia gown, and the Wretch and the Imp are along, of course. First they followed up behind the hedge through the Forsythe lot, startin’ from the old place where the hole was, though why they made a point of that instead of slantin’ straight through from the house to the corner is more’n I can conject. I see ’em from my winder and then I went into the south attic and watched ’em from there till they all three jumped the wall and turned down street, full split, and then I went front and looked after ’em till they got out of sight round the turn. ’Twa’n’t ten minutes

afterwards, when I'd just done makin' my bed, that them stars and stripes come flyin' over the orchard — from the Forsythe side and the apple tree mind you — to the lane walk ; and if she did n't set right down on it, and if them dogs' heads did n't rare up from beyond into her lap, and she begin praisin' 'em and sayin' ' Good dogs! Fine fellers!' and feedin' 'em with things out of her satchel, and then the whole batch start off again, down the lane to the village. I'm going up for another squinny, for they 'll be comin' back some way, and I'll riddle it out if I can."

I wondered if the riddling out that occurred to me could possibly be the right one, but I did not risk a spoken suggestion, which Martha Blunt might have derided, and which would at any rate have robbed her of the pleasure of her own discoveries and solutions.

Martha would have missed a great deal out of her life if it had not been for those attic windows. I am very glad that I had that old sky-lighted garret finished off into bedrooms and a trunk room, and the two nice gable windows put in and the north

and south dormers thrown out. She made daily reconnoissance of the neighborhood movement from one after the other in her rounds ; knew who went down to the morning trains, and who came up in the afternoons ; who went up and down to and from church on Sundays ; could count the carriages over the hill when Mrs. Forsythe had her parties, and those in the long, slow lines of frequent funerals ; and when the fire-whistle sounded at night could be out of bed before the last round was blown, and at the right window for observation, knowing pretty nearly by heart the whole list of box numbers. She was as happy as the old monarch of Granada with his talisman chessboard and magic horseman in the tower. Once that spring we had watched a beautiful woods fire over on Birch Hill, together. I brought up my fine field-glass that had been my brother's, and I had the sense afterward to leave it on the bureau in the south attic. After that there was, as I anticipated, a delight for Martha Blunt beyond old Boabdil's. If she had not had her share of the New England conscience, I might not have ventured to

trust her for her time with it. The fact also that there were mostly only open road and country, or back yards and gardens to survey — no neighbor's windows near enough to tempt or afford an undue observation — left my own conscience in the matter undisturbed.

When Martha came down that day and reported, she was as mystified as a chief of police with a clue that ended nowhere.

"It beats me," she said. "They all came tearin' back again, up the road and through the Forsythe piece, and then she ordered 'em again somehow over there, and went back alone down the hill and round to the lane, and then over the wall to this side and up through the orchard and along the apple-tree trunk, and down she sat again and up came the heads and the tails wavin' like flags, and there was more cossetin' and praisin' and feedin'; choc'lit creams this time if you'll believe it, and that glass is to be depended on. I see her put 'em on their noses, and make 'em hold 'em there till she give the word. Pity somebody couldn't train her to mind as she trains them. Well, that was the whole of it. They

went home across lots, and I'd admire to have you tell me, if you can, what it all meant and what they gained by it."

"You're not so sharp as usual, Martha Blunt," I answered her.

"I s'pose you think you know, and I s'pose I know what you think you know. I ain't such a fool that I can't see what there is to see. What I want is to see *through* it. You told her she was welcome to go across without the dogs; and she's carried the p'int, and I hope it's a satisfaction. So far, there's a kind of redickleous sense to it. But if she's goin' to do it that way all through July and August, — well, I guess she'll have enough of the dog days!"

That looked very likely. Bidy and the dogs kept up their trips day after day for about a week; Martha watched upstairs and I down, and I think we were both relieved when it was apparent the training was accomplished, and we saw the girl herself take quite leisurely the short cut across under my trees, while the Wretch and the Imp, each with one of her gloves in his mouth, trotted virtuously down the hill to-

gether by the road, evidently under orders to guard at the appointed place of meeting until her coming.

I managed to be busy in the garden when she came back. She swung herself up into the apple tree and walked to its bend above the hedge, where she sat down and began her bestowal of rewards of merit. The dogs stood with their fore legs planted on the big trunk beside her, but their hind feet kept scrupulously on Forsythe soil. I walked down toward her. She saw me coming ; her side face looked conscious and complacent, but she did not turn round or obviously notice until I was within easy hearing distance. Then she ordered the dogs down and squared her attitude to confront my approach.

“Are you coming to speak to me?” she called out blithely. “I should like to be polite and meet you halfway. And I’d like to come into your garden, too. May I drop?”

“Of course. You’ve established the open door on my conditions. It’s a treaty.”

She dropped and came toward me with outstretched hand.

"I'm glad," she said. "I don't like strained relations."

"Nor I. Still less the dogs of war let loose. You've kept them off. How have you accomplished it? I am very curious to know."

"It's very simple," said Bidly Forsythe, with her most direct and innocent look. "It's thought transference. They've got little minds of their own, you see, and I've got hold of them, and can give them an idea out of mine, if I'm positive and determined enough myself, and sure enough of them. They like a new idea as well as anybody. They're as proud of culture as all Topthorpe. You can do anything with them if you only believe in their little minds."

She spoke with the utmost gravity.

"You're a very odd girl, Miss Bidly," I told her.

"Ain't I? But nobody believes in me as I do in my dogs."

"I've a good mind to believe in you myself," was what rushed to my lips to say, in answer to that, but I kept it back. I thought I had better let the impulse wait.

I talked to her about my flowers, though, and I gathered some sweet peas and Madame Plantier roses for her, and then I asked her into the house with me, and she came.

I brought her a plate of Martha Blunt's cookies. She sat and ate them, saying, as everybody else did, that there were never any cookies like them. Only the way she put it was, "I never tasted anything like them in my *dreams*!"

We got so sociable that at last I told her all about the Plymouth Rock and my old crime. "You see you are not the first Biddy that has trespassed," I said, and she made up a face of staring horror at me, and caught her breath with a shudder as she answered, —

"I suppose I might have been the next one to be lynched, if there'd happened to be a potato basket handy; and then — what would have been the rest of the story, Miss Gainsworth?" she ended solemnly.

"We had better both be careful, perhaps," I said. "History might repeat itself."

"They say it's very apt to." And as she

spoke something seemed to strike her fancy suddenly, and she laughed.

I laughed too, wondering within myself where all my old wrath had gone to. Yet I felt a misgiving that it was only gone for the time, and that there was something still to be careful about, as I had said. Getting into casual touch with the girl's better mind proved nothing as to possible future contingencies. And I doubted myself quite as much as I did her. I had not her confidence in my own hypnotic powers. So I let the joking stop there, and resumed a guarded gravity.

"Would n't you like to know how I happened to be a Biddy?" she asked presently, with corresponding seriousness.

"Surely," I told her. "I am fond of getting new knowledges, particularly about names and persons. I believe in their relations."

"Well, I named myself. Babies often do. They christened me after an old archæological — I mean genealogical — dame, way back in the colonial record, — Belinda. I could n't make anything of it, when I came to try, but Biddy. That took, and at school

and about, in a general way, it has stayed by. My stepmother calls me Linda; she never liked the whole name, but she could n't establish her modification. My father used to call me Bee; when I was very good he would say Honey-bee, and sometimes just Honey."

Her voice softened, and she stopped there. I got another little heart-touch with her. She had loved her father. He had been dead three years, just the critical years of her forming womanhood.

She began again after a slight pause, —

"Nobody calls me Belinda, out long, but my stepbrother. He disapproves of me very much, and would like to straighten me out. He's awfully proper—and good, I suppose."

She picked up another cooky, and nibbled at it daintily.

"I don't like properness and goodness, — all by themselves and continually insisted on; and I don't like my tall name put upon me just to make me stand up to it and not caper. But I have my revenge on him. He's Grahame Maclyn, you know — Dr. Maclyn — just got his degree. Needs shaking out of the perpendicular as much as I need

straightening into it. I've crumpled him up, English fashion, into Grimalkin — Grim for short. When he's pretty pleasant — or very cross, and I want to make him crosser — I say Pussy."

I passed by that nonsense, or cleverness, as I thought she wanted me to perceive it, and took up her first proposition.

"Do you suppose it is the unmitigated properness and goodness that anybody insists on with you?" I asked her. "Don't you think it may be so apparent that you have enough of the qualifying elements to be in no danger of having them neutralized? If I get a little too much salt or spice into my cooking, I just add accordingly of principal material, and then the seasoning is apt to turn out all right."

"Maybe — in puddings and gingerbread; but I don't like to be stirred up too much, or tried and tasted till there's nothing left of me. That is n't it, either; there's nothing tentative about it; it's settled condemnation; it's nips and growls and bites; I told Grim one day that I believed in some former incarnation he'd been a tiger and had eaten me up. And he said, 'Very

likely; I'd disagreed with him ever since.' Lately he's been trying masterly inactivity. He's awfully polite, but he won't take the least unnecessary notice of me. He's a queer kind of a brother, for the only one I ever had. But it does n't matter; nothing does, I suppose, very much, or won't, a hundred years hence."

As an expression of indifference, probably, she coolly helped herself to another cookie.

There were two left on the plate when she got up to go and thanked me.

"Might I have these last two for Rex and Imp? I don't bring them up on nothing but ideas. They've been guarding things for me on the other side of your hedge for half an hour, and I want them to feel appreciated."

"As you like. I brought them all for you."

She was quite welcome to them, though I am afraid I spoke a little stiffly — not on account of the liberty, but because I was hoping that Martha would not be on observation with the glass, and that Biddy would not hold up the cakes in too plain evidence, making the dogs spring for them.

This being in my mind, when she met what might have seemed to be in it with the marked sweetness she always used in rejoinder to admonition or reproof, and said confidently, "Thank you, ever so much; I wish, if you don't mind, you'd just come down with me and see their beautiful behavior for yourself," I accepted the suggestion with courteous readiness. As we passed out by the side door from the little entryway, however, I had the presence of mind to pick up my sun umbrella from the corner. The hot noonshine was mounting overhead; if there were anything else to be shielded from, the double purpose could be answered.

"I've given them two old shopping-bags," Biddy began telling me as we walked slowly down the garden. "They carry them down and bring them back for me, with books or mail or what not. I send them round, and go across and meet them at the lane, and *vice versa* coming back. It works delightfully, don't you think so?"

"I think it's wonderful, but I don't see how you have trained them to it—and so soon."

"Oh, they know their commandments,

and keep 'em. There 's a dog decalogue, Miss Gainsworth, and they learned it long ago. I did n't have to begin away back with that."

I suppose I looked fresh wonder and inquiry, but I was perverse enough not to say or ask anything more. I would not be astonished to order.

She began to count with her fingers, touching with those of one hand the cakes she held in the other.

"There 's 'Fetch,' and 'Carry,' and 'Find,' and 'Charge,' and 'Guard;' and there 's 'Back,' and 'Down,' and 'Home,' and 'Hold,' and 'Catch' (that 's when I put things on their noses and make 'em wait for the word); and there 's 'Speak to 'em!' and 'Sick 'em!' But those are emergency orders, supplementary, like Self-defence and Sabbath works. Don't you think Dr. Christieson could make a sermon out of it?"

I thought she was doing pretty well with it herself, but I said nothing, for there was no need. She was just springing up on the apple tree, and in a moment was settled at her own end of it just over the hedge, and receiving from her faithful allies the delivery

of their trusts and their huge caresses, discharging her own part of the compact with the expected tidbits and encomiums. I looked on, my umbrella poised over my shoulder in careful line with my house. I dare say it did not matter ; I doubt how minutely the field-glass can distinguish, although it is a powerful one. Martha thought she had seen chocolate creams put on the dogs' noses at a similar distance, but perhaps a pink confectionery box may have had something to do with that demonstration. Anyhow, I was more comfortable to know that details could not be observed, or comparison made between the empty plate on the parlor table and the time occupied with the present reflections, for Biddy was very deliberate, and had a good deal more to give out than the two cookies.

She went on talking to me and the dogs in alternate fashion. "They're not quite Christians. — No, Rex, not yet. Hold, sir! — Now, catch! — They have n't learnt the two New Testament ones, — Imp! drop it! That's for Rex! — though they're partly on in them, too. They love *up*, as far as they can, with all their might, — There,

that's all, now go!—and alongside a certain way. They love each other. Look at them, now, Miss Gainsworth."

The two great creatures, released by dismissal, were playing together in the grass; barking, springing, growling friendly and pretending to bite, rolling over each other in apparent strife, that was really tumultuous endearment. Certainly there was brotherly love between them; and when they came bounding back to Biddy at her single utterance of their names, and stretched themselves at her feet at her word, with eyes uplifted to her face in dog-worship, and tails sweeping to and fro with eager expression that from tip to tail they were hers devotedly and only, they surely illustrated to the limit of their nature the loving upward. I thought they would not be Wretch and Imp to me any more, in the invidious interpretation. As for Biddy herself, I could not yet make up my mind. There were such very odd contradictions in her. We have to be slow in our human estimates. We can understand the brutes, so far as they go. Perhaps it is because we have been there. It is the human that is

complex and contradictory, and we have not yet been able to account for ourselves.

“I noticed two orders you gave them, Miss Biddy, that you did n’t count in the commandments, — ‘Drop it!’ and ‘Go!’ You made remarks to them, besides,” I said. “It does n’t seem to be all in the ten words.”

“Synonyms, — paraphrases, — amplifications,” she replied quickly. “Everything was n’t in the ten sayings of Moses, either. It took a whole book of laws afterward to carry out principles into particulars. Elements, and combinations; alphabets and language; if you know beginnings you can follow developments. I’m surprised at you, Miss Gainsworth.”

I left off at that. It was hazardous to try to draw out Biddy Forsythe. You were likely to draw out more than you could dispose of.

We bade each other good-by very amiably. She asked me if she might come again, and I told her I hoped she would.

I went into the house the kitchen way. Martha Blunt was there, and received me with a sounding thump of her flatiron, — on the ironing-board I mean, of course.

When she is a little out of sorts, she emphasizes. Spoons rattle, dishes clatter ; if things are very bad, she shakes the range and throws on coal.

“So you're in it, after all, ain't you?” she remarked. I was glad she was not so far gone in disapproval as *not* to remark. “Expect to keep it up?”

“What?” I vouchsafed the monosyllable of inquiry as more dignified than a rebuked or offended silence.

“Dog luncheons,” Martha answered as concisely.

“Well, Martha, it was only two, and they were” —

“Only two! Mercy to us! As if there might just as well be a dozen!”

I laughed at her lucky interruption to my all but made confession. She meant dogs, not cookies. I finished differently, “And they were extremely well behaved, Martha.” I said it with some loftiness and a slight stress upon the pronoun, and passed on through the kitchen.

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V

STEP-RELATIONS

It was just after Mr. Forsythe's death that Biddy first went away to school. She did so at her own request. Mrs. Forsythe made no objections. The girl's childhood was over, the days of her father's indulgence of her full daughterhood in the home were past. It was easy to understand — and it was the easier and plainer as time went on — how on each side there was reasonable motive, and beneath the reasonable motive some deeper instinct also, for this arrangement.

Biddy had simply said, "I *can't* stay. Send me off somewhere." And her step-mother, in a way she had of accounting to people, had said to her friends with fine wisdom and amiable allowance, "It will be better for her. She needs to mix with others; she has been the only one so long. And the influence at the Dorrington school is so excellent. She will learn something of

the world in the best way. It is my *duty* to let her go."

So Biddy was only at home in the vacations. Grahame Maclyn was at home from Cambridge in his. In these accidental times they fraternized and quarreled, made and unmade some opinions of each other, and without being aware of it were manipulated back and forth by the lady in connection with whom they were brought together.

Mrs. Forsythe had, in the earlier years of her second marriage, when her boy of twelve and her little stepdaughter of five were first associated as brother and sister, been very complacent over their happy relation and her own tenderly impartial management. Everybody said she was filling a difficult position in the most admirable manner. That was what she wanted everybody to say. In those days Biddy's bright little freaks and funny effronteries had only been matter for tolerance and amusing quotation as instances of childish cleverness; and Grahame's steadiness and a certain elder-brotherly power of his over her caprices were as happily adverted to as stay and reliance, and of great promise

for reciprocal good as they should both grow up.

All this pointed pretty clearly, people thought, to a hope for their manhood and womanhood which was indicated both by natural adaptedness and the peculiar fitting of circumstance. To be sure there were seven years between their ages, but that would n't be very unusual, when the time came. And girls grow up fast.

Colonel Maclyn had not left a large property, although he possessed a quite respectable independence apart from his profession, and had prudently insisted upon the duty of restricting expenses to the amount of his army pay; so the widow and her son had not come to the Forsythe home without the means of adding their proportional part to the family resources. Mr. Forsythe was rich, and there was only Biddy; it would be most comfortable; everybody saw it, and saw that Mrs. Forsythe saw it also.

Upon Mr. Forsythe's death, however, some uncertainties appeared which his longer life would very likely have brought to satisfactory arrangement. It is very apt to happen so when running affairs are suddenly

stopped and an estate has to be settled. There would be two years before results could be absolutely obtained. And so it was quite as well, in this interval, that other things should remain *in statu quo*; that Grahame Maclyn should be at Harvard and Biddy at the Dorrington school. It was doubtless in this same connection, and in the varying aspects of the business interests from time to time, that the manipulations just alluded to began to take effect during the home-comings of the young people.

However that might be, domestic uncertainties undoubtedly did begin synchronously with those outside. Sometimes the wind blew east, and sometimes west or south. Now and then Mrs. Forsythe would meet such tentative observations as a kindly neighborhood offers with a cold, ignoring manner, and say something about the difficulty of always understanding what was best to do; she 'supposed there were problems in all families, but particularly where two were brought together and temperaments differed.' And again she would smile and say that 'character had to assert itself;

people might grow together all the more for understanding each other's differences; or they might find out just what they could not be, and make the best of it. Whatever happened, there would be no real disunion in their case. They had been a family together too long for that.' If ever anybody could bring two opposite ends of a proposition into smooth accord, or assert either, as might happen, without a glaring inconsistency, it was certainly Mrs. Grant Forsythe. So she went on making her little manipulations, and every move and turn was always a doing of her duty. The neighborhood also went on doing its duty, and making its observations.

At about the time that young Maclyn took his degree and Bidley returned from Dorrington for good, there got about a rumor that the Forsythe inheritance was badly reduced. A large tract of suburban real estate, of steadily rising value, had been seized for the public by right — or wrong — of eminent domain, and only a poor fourth of its evident worth had been paid the executors after an expensive lawsuit. It was at about this time that Mrs. For-

sythe began to find her native east winds intolerable, and to dread the coming winter, and to talk of possibly going abroad before Christmas. She had a sister in England whose health was suffering, and it began to seem her duty to go. People wondered if she would take Biddy, or if Biddy would be taken; what else could be done with her; whether any other matters were settled either way, or likely to be; and so with suspended decisions and wavering conjectures the summer weeks passed on.

Biddy got in the way of coming to see me pretty often. She was fond of Martha's cookies; and she was, after her odd, half-consenting fashion, growing fond of me. If I had not also been growing fond of her, I should easily have contrived means to check the intimacy and save my cookies, for I am by no means a person to be imposed upon, whatever Martha Blunt's manner may sometimes intimate. Martha continued, on her own part, to air her very decided opinions of the young lady, as entirely unaffected by any of her deferences or blandishments. "Folks can't get round *me* so easy," she declared.

If I had been a newspaper writer, or even a more busily conjecturing woman, I might have shaped considerable "story" from Biddy's frank talk in these interviews. I realized my opportunities, but I never pushed them. Neighbors realized and asked me questions. Did I suppose — so and so? I made it a rule not to suppose anything, far less to dispose, other than by such kindly personal influence upon Biddy herself as I found possible. I was very much interested in using that, and hoped that future outcomes might in some small measure be the better for it; but otherwise I left the outcomes to take care of themselves.

VI

IN AN ELECTRIC

I WAS going in town one day to do some shopping at Flood and Fenn's, and Martha wanted a little kerosene heater for her flat-irons, so I took her with me to choose that, and for other help and comfort that she could give me. I always feel better to have somebody with me in case of accident, on the chance that one of the two may survive to identify the pieces of the other. Nothing ever was sure in this world, I know, as to being safe a minute; but it seems to me nowadays that there is beginning to be a sort of certainty the other way. There does n't seem to be a minute, anywhere, without a deadly peril in it, whether it is demonstrated every time or not. I've a perfect horror of the human multitude that you have to fling yourself into and be only an atom of, that no other atom has any business with or any care for, whenever you go into city cars and streets. I feel like a lost soul every time.

So I take Martha with me when I can make it convenient, though I feel rather mean to put her chances along with mine in that way just for the company that misery likes.

We were walking down the hill to the village to take an electric. I held out against electrics when they first came, until the last horse car vanished from the tracks ; and the first time I had to get into one I sat down at the back end and said to Martha, — you may be sure I had her with me that day, — “Stop right here! I want to keep as far from that newsboy as I can.” You see in those days they generally ran over a newsboy every few trips. And then I sat with my eyes shut till Martha nudged me and I had to open them to pay the fares, and then again till “Flood and Fenn’s” was called out and the car was emptying itself at the wide crossing in front of the great omnigatherum store.

I remarked, when I interrupted myself, — as the Autocrat says, — that we were walking down the hill, Martha and I, on our way to the electric.

As we turned out of my gate, we saw before us, halfway down, the two young

people, Dr. Maclyn and Bidy Forsythe. She seemed to be hurriedly putting herself together as to last things; he was holding her satchel and parasol and gloves, and she was struggling with her veil. I scented mischief preense in it all; it was a good way from the start to be beginning with this finishing. They were getting into the current of passage and observation, and Bidy's queernesses were never behind the scenes, but always required an open stage, — not but that she would exert her genius for the entertainment or bewilderment of a single person, — as witness her little essays for the rector's benefit or mine, — but there must be an auditor, a looker-on, and where the single one was difficult to persuade to sympathy, there must be the stimulus of outside notice and the counterplay of diversion and disapprobation.

Bidy had both hands up at the back of her head, — that position and effort sufficiently distressing when at quiet standstill before one's mirror in one's own room, but in a downhill progression and with half-blinded outlook from the necessity of the case, a truly distracting conjuncture. I felt

a sympathy in all my muscles, and hastened on to offer help.

Martha understood the quickening of my steps. "You need n't," she said. "She don't want you. You'll only interfere. It's her own fix—and her own fixin'."

Biddy suddenly stopped short. Out flew the veil and floated wide, like the web of the Lady of Shalott. Dr. Maclyn pursued the bit of gauze into the middle of the street, and Biddy began to look about her on the ground.

"It snapped out of my fingers," she said dolorously, as we came up with her. "Veil pins and hairpins always do, and they always secrete themselves mysteriously."

"Apurpuss, I don't doubt," said Martha Blunt, and passed majestically on, while I paused with Biddy to help investigate the gutter.

Grahame Maclyn rejoined us with the veil. His hands were full of feminine small gear, and he could not lift his hat; but he made a motion thereto with the fluttering veil, said good-morning, and dropped behind us as we walked on.

"Never mind," said Biddy cheerfully,

abandoning the hunt. "It's only the beginning of sorrows. There'll be worse yet, probably; they always keep on, as a shower comes after a sprinkle. I can get a pin at Packer's as we go by." And then she bent her head closer and said low, "I'm putting him through his politeness, and working up his contempt. It's such fun to be frivolous, and make him stately. We both do it so well."

"Do you think it pays?" I asked her.

"Does anything? Don't you always have to be like The Marchioness, and make believe very much?"

I detected the little sting of a bitter sincerity in her tone, which sometimes belies—as sincerity can belie—that which offers on the surface.

There was a car standing at the terminus just above, as we turned the corner of the road by Packer's shop. The shop-door was open, and Bidy put her head in.

"Miss Sharples! Give me a veil pin, quick! I'm all in pieces, and we must catch that trolley."

The shop-girl snatched a pin from the cushion on the counter, and hurried round

with it, leaving a customer with a piece of goods in her hand and an inquiry on her lips. Everybody in the village sprang at Biddy Forsythe's call ; it was a way she had with her ; there was fun and privilege in responding to her oddities. We left Miss Sharples laughing in the doorway ; she was proud of Biddy Forsythe's liberties with her. The customer, a village lady, — a different degree from the village woman, and with a very different estimation of liberties, — let fall the piece of goods and walked away through an inner door to the millinery department.

Martha Blunt marched on ahead of us. There was just the opposite of any admiring relish in the hold of her head and the tramp of her tread. I felt myself included with Biddy and the shop-girl in her indignation. I always am when I fail to share it. She sat very stiff and silent after we had taken our places in the car, which happened to be a closable one with facing seats, but open as far as practicable with doors and windows.

Biddy was quiet enough at first. She pinned her veil on without mishap ; then

she relieved Dr. Maclyn of her impedimenta, and took on a quite remote and dignified air as passengers came in at successive corners and the benches filled up. When the audience was well assembled, however, and we were spinning along a good stretch of the avenue without hail, her little comedy opened.

She began putting on her gloves. Working leisurely at one, she let the other drop on the floor. Dr. Maclyn picked it up and laid it in her lap. Then she opened her satchel and took out a pocket handkerchief, and in the movement dropped the glove again. Again the young man picked it up, while she sat serene, smoothing the fingers of the first one with great care and deliberation. She had left the satchel open, and presently it tipped sidewise and a fan slid out. Dr. Maclyn did not hurry with his service this time. A smile was flickering round the car, but the two performers were calmly nonchalant.

“Oh, please pick up my fan,” the girl said sweetly. “How slippery things are!” And she gave a sweep to her skirt to help matters, which sent the fan across the aisle. Grahame

reached after and recovered it, but as he resumed his position she managed that the satchel itself should be in the way of his elbow, and down went that. By this time the general smile had broken in spots to a titter.

“Why, Grim!” she exclaimed softly, “what can you be about?”

Receiving the satchel, her own elbow disturbed the tall-handled parasol which stood between them, and it described a segment of a circle and dropped its stylish gun-metal knob against the knee of a lady opposite.

“I beg your pardon,” said Dr. Maclyn with unmoved countenance, as he reclaimed it and planted it firmly between his own knees.

Biddy apparently paid no sort of attention. She was busy replacing things — all except the handkerchief — in the shopping-bag, and carefully fastening the clasp. Then she turned round and noticed.

“Oh, don’t trouble yourself that way!” she apologetically exclaimed, and taking it from him passed it dexterously over their heads and deposited it on the cushion behind.

“There! now I *have* lost my glove!”

she began, *da capo*, shaking her dress and stooping this side and that, but doing all with conspicuous quietness and speaking in the most gently restrained voice.

There was a rustle of polite movement up and down the lines, as the spectators turned away from staring and endeavored not to smile aloud.

Martha Blunt actually grew taller, right there in her seat. Her backbone stretched upward, her neck reared, her head elevated itself, and her eyes seemed to pierce the roof, so determinedly she ignored and lifted herself above the reprehensible farce.

Biddy Forsythe seemed to have resumed control of her erratic belongings. She had made an excavation of her satchel, and found the missing glove stuffed in at the bottom. It was now comfortably on, her toilet was finished, and she was at leisure to make little friendly, innocent remarks to Dr. Maclyn, who received them in as much silence as she permitted to be decently possible. Indeed, that was almost a complete muteness, for her object seemed clearly to be to make him exhibit all the offended dignity she could provoke. She was beautifully ladylike and

irreproachable; on his part, outwardly, there were absolute imperturbability and unruffledness.

“He’s raging inside,” Biddy whispered to me over her shoulder. “But his rages are always underneath. He’s a quiet volcano; you can dance on the edge of the crater with perfect safety.”

“Until you tumble,” I whispered back to her.

She flashed a quick look at me with a side flirt of her eyelashes, which demanded, more instinctively and plainly than she knew, how much I meant.

The conductor came his round, collecting fares. Then the curtain rose on a new act.

Biddy hurried to be beforehand with her own nickel, and dropped her portemonnaie, from which rolled half a dozen coins. The conductor and Dr. Maclyn bumped their hat-brims together as they pursued the bits of change along the grooves of the corrugated floor. Biddy smiled graciously as they were restored to her, and as she put them back into their pockets let her handkerchief escape from her and “go that selfsame way again.”

She set her foot upon it when her all-enduring companion moved automatically to regain it.

"Let it be. I draw the line at pocket handkerchiefs," she said with perfect gravity. "They come into too intimate relation. You understand that, of course, doctor?"

She gave him his title with just an emphasizing breath. The doctor never smiled, neither did he even condescend to frown.

"I've got another, of course," she went on, in the same even, simple way. "But if I should try to keep that, I should be sure to use the wrong one, no matter where I should tuck it away."

At that, two or three outright laughs broke forth, but were checked at their first chuckles. Biddy looked round, gently surprised, and Dr. Maelyn held his features in the sort of composure with which one sits for a photograph.

Biddy was struck with that very idea. "Now, look pleasant!" she mimicked, in a quick aside, with the true professional glance at approved effect.

A little farther on we stopped at Aspen-

dale Street. Half a dozen persons were waiting there to get in. Bidy started up.

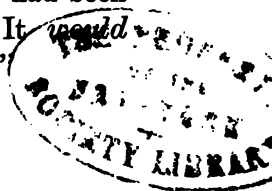
"It's getting too public," she said. "All the world is going my way. It always does. They're all bound for Flood and Fenn's. I'll sidetrack off, and go and see my dress-maker. She's right over there in the square, and she's been waiting for me. Good-by, doctor. Good-by, Miss Gainsworth."

She gave my right hand a little mischievous squeeze with her left as she turned away. Dr. Maclyn preceded her gravely down the car to help her off.

Martha Blunt thrust her arm behind me, and knocked me on the back with something; then she pitched herself along the passageway and lunged forward the tall-handled parasol, point foremost, with which she prodded Bidy between the shoulders.

"You were going to leave that, were you," she called out wrathfully, "for him to find and carry round all day?"

"Thank you, *ever* so much, Miss Blunt — or Sharp, is it? — I always forget," the girl answered as blandly as if she had been neither detected nor poked. "It ^{would} have been a shame, would n't it?"



As she alighted from the high car step with help of the doctor's hand, the parasol fell again at his feet. Responding to the "pick-me-up" emergency for the last time, he dusted the silk folds with the handkerchief she had repudiated, shook that out vigorously, and put it in his own pocket.

Once more in his seat, he unfolded a paper which he took from the breast of his coat, and became straightway absorbed in some long-columned article of a medical journal.

Why had n't he done that before?

Biddy Forsythe's statement concerning him answered the question. He was too thoroughly — and rebukingly — polite.

VII

A GLORIOUS STUNT

BIDDY came over one morning when I was planning a busy day,— two letters to write, monthly bills to look over and checks to fill out for them, my plants in my upstairs window balcony to trim and rearrange, and a new little lace cap for afternoons, to make.

I am particular about my little caps ; they are not mobby or nightcappy, rather quite nobby and day-dressy, though as simple as a small puffed crown and a soft, light border can render them. I could make my head up quite young, if I chose ; I have very good hair, and it waves nicely with slight help ; but I care more for my time than for crimps, and prefer to represent myself from the common sense and simplicity side of my middle-aged nature, rather than from the weaker bit of me that has survived, as it does in most women, from my sixteenth year, and still hankers after prettiness. The

mistake we make after forty is as to the sort of prettiness then available. My own hankering, I was about to confess, makes me careful about my caps. I want them to "set jest so," as Martha Blunt says; consequently numerous little tryings on before the glass are necessary, and certain prinkings and critical side inspections are to be gone through with, which might seem to an observer more frivolous than crimps, possibly, but are really an economical disposing of small vanities at one stroke, that they may be set aside and leave the soul free from daily fritter or temptation for a good while after. That is my philosophy of caps, but you can perceive that my cap-making is not company-work; neither is letter-writing, nor washing of plants and flower-pots, especially upstairs, and involving much tugging and trotting back and forth between window garden and bathroom. So Biddy Forsythe's appearance between nine and ten o'clock, and her announcement that she had come to ask if she might spend the day, upset my whole programme, and literally "put me about," in the phrase that has naturally grown to

express the temper induced by such interferences.

“The belle-mère has gone to town, and out to Cedar Hill to a swell lunch. I’m a deserted orphan. You find me on your doorstep,” she said, as I met her there. “I felt a sudden pull this way and to you. You told me I might come some day, you know. Is n’t this some day, or does that kind of invitation always mean some other? It’s very apt to, I believe.”

I did not contradict that statement, for in the nature of things it is certainly liable to turn out so; but I told her she was welcome, as I had made her in my mind between my first discomfiture and the end of her characteristic speech. People are not always so insincere as they may make themselves to appear in such sudden concurrences. “Between the saddle and the ground mercy is sought and mercy found;” on the steps of the staircase as one comes down to receive a call whose summons has been met with an “Oh, bother!” and an impatient tossing aside of the little pasteboard warrant served, the mood adjusts itself, and the one is as sincere as the other. The wind changes and the

vane points differently, yet just as true. I am "glad to see you," almost always by the time I get into the room and say it. If not, I say simply, "Good-morning," or "How do you do?" with real courtesy so far as it goes.

Biddy was bewitching in a dainty little pink blouse and a white piqué skirt. She had her hat in her hand, where it oftener was than on her head. Its mass of soft rose-colored bows made a flush of summer color against the white gown.

"I shall be glad to have you stay," I said to her, "only I must write one letter for the noon mail, if you'll excuse me long enough. I shall only be ten minutes or so; I want to send it down by the grocer's man, who will be here by the time it is ready."

"Why, of course. And if you're behind-hand, I'll take it."

I thanked her, and brought out a book from the parlor, — Mrs. Wiggin's last story, — offering it to her as better company than mine until I should return.

She had tossed her hat on the hall table, and as I turned and went upstairs she stretched herself comfortably upon the long

sofa between the doors and settled at once to her reading.

I made haste with my letter, which was only a business note, finished it within the ten minutes, and went down by the back way to the kitchen to leave it and my grocery orders with Martha. Coming up into the hall again at the further end, I called out cheerfully before I reached its middle dividing doorway, "I'm quite ready now, only I won't interrupt Mrs. Wiggin," when a step further toward the sofa stopped me. There was no girl there.

I looked right and left into the open rooms; they were unoccupied. The hat still lay upon the table under the stairs, but that proved nothing, according to Biddy's way of doing things. I walked to the front door and out upon the porch, vaguely reconnoitring.

Across the way, a little further up the street, Dr. Kinsman's buggy was standing before the Fletchers' gate. Old Mrs. Fletcher is a permanent, comfortable invalid.

In the buggy, book in hand, and apparently absorbed, sat Biddy Forsythe, just as she had left her lounge, without hat or

wrap, her bright russet hair shimmering in changeful gleams as the wind stirred it and the light trembled back and forth upon it from between swaying boughs of a great elm tree that swept out over the wall.

“Now what?” I asked of myself in perplexity. It was too far off for me to call to her, and it would have done no good if I had; perhaps only inspired her to further mischief than she at present intended.

The doctor came out, smiled and bowed, and then there were evidently some words exchanged between them. I thought the doctor equal to the case, and stepped back, not to be observed observing. I would go quietly upstairs, and pick up my own broken day again.

There came a pink rush past me as I stood on the third step up, where I had paused, hearing rapid footfalls along the sidewalk. Bidy snatched her hat, and rushed back. “He won’t let me go without it,” she called to me on the run. “He’s going a long way up the sunny turnpike, and he does n’t choose to take a case of sunstroke along with him.” The latter half of the explanation, if it might pass for

such, streamed back to me from beyond the threshold, as she streamed down the steps.

The shift of circumstances is often very kaleidoscopic, but it makes some figure every time to which you can adapt and reconcile yourself; not infrequently representing one you had regretted as shattered into irrecoverable bits. I went back to my room and made a success of my cap, which quite restored my complacency. I put it on in time for luncheon and for Biddy Forsythe, who appeared, two hours later, for that meal, and also complacent, as if her style of spending the day with a person were quite unexceptional. She was full of her trip, and entertained me with its details all the while we were at the table. I noticed that Martha Blunt never retired farther than the pantry between her acts of service to us.

"We had a lovely time," she said. "It was perfectly great. After the turnpike stretch we got into the woodsy roads, and he let me take my hat off. He took off his. The horse walked. We talked. I explained to him why I came. It was n't only for the ride. I wanted to tell him about germs. I'd been saving it up for a long time. I'd

have told Grim, if he 'd ever been good long enough."

"*You — tell — them!*" I ejaculated, in a three-syllable crescendo.

"Why not? I know. I always knew. I invented germs. I made it all up with Elise Rich when we went to school together to Miss Rancy. I was about six years old. At least, I thought I made it up; just as they think now they have discovered it. I told Elise one day that I was n't a bit afraid of giants nor ghosts nor burglars nor bears nor even of cows and mice. But there was something truly awful that I *was* afraid of. It was a tiny little thing, so small you could n't see it, round, and with a scrap of a tail. There were millions and millions of them, hiding in all sorts of places, and especially among things to eat. The way they did was to roll into your mouth when they got a chance, and then you swallowed, and then they grew. We got so scared, telling each other more and more about them, that we did n't dare to open our mouths anywhere near certain particular places or things where we said they would be hiding. A butcher's cart or a fruit wagon — ber-

ries especially—was terrible to meet. We used to clap our hands over our lips and noses, and run. There were ever so many things we would n't touch at the table. I did n't eat a berry all that summer, and I hardly ate anything if the berry dish was on my side of the table. They were worried to death about me, and I would n't tell, because I knew, really, it was all my own nonsense that I had worked up, or else I don't think I should have been such a pig as to let them eat without telling them. But is n't it queer how the whole theory fits now? We were n't afraid of *cooked* things. We knew that after they were cooked they could n't be alive, and could n't grow."

"And you told all this to Dr. Kinsman?"

"Yes. And he was delighted. He said that there certainly was nothing new under the sun, and that children and fools and crazy people got hold of lots of things that wise old ones had to creep round to by very slow experiments. And then I got in just what I was really aiming at.

"'What do you keep investigating for?' I asked him. 'Why don't you take things the natural way?' I told him I did n't see

the use of hunting germs and trying to kill them off, when there were such millions and millions of them and they never could catch them all. I should think the best way was to keep clear of what they hide in, and look out for plenty of good things that are safe for people, and I guessed if they trusted more to experience and did n't experiment so much, the germs might be left to themselves — or each other. 'Are n't there good germs?' I asked him. And he said, 'Most certainly. They are what we live on.' 'And they on the bad ones, probably,' I suggested. 'Why can't we be contented, and let them fight it out? Would n't they have been made bigger, if it was meant that we should bother with them? While you doctors are chasing the wicked germs, you are n't finding out so much about the holy ones, *I think.*'

"And then he laughed and laughed, and I did n't quite know whether it was because I was funny or silly or bright or all three. So presently I began again, on another part of it. 'I guess everything is a germ,' I told him. 'We're germs ourselves, probably.'

“ ‘ And there are two sorts, as we see by analogy,’ he said very soberly.

“ ‘ I don’t know about that,’ I told him again. ‘ I’ve thought about that, too. How do you know that the germs are n’t pretty much all alike in the very beginning, and that they turn out to be one sort or the other according to their bringing up?’

“ Then he sat round in his corner of the buggy and drew back his head and looked at me in an over-and-down sort of way.

“ ‘ I wonder,’ said he, ‘ being a girl, — and the specimen of a girl you are, — whether you are the spoiling of a minister or a doctor.’

“ And after that he whipped up his horse (that had been listening to us with first one ear cocked back and then the other, as we took turns in speaking), and we came to a patient’s house, and he went in and stayed twenty minutes, while I finished Wiggin, and arranged another little matter that came suddenly into my head.”

She paused for me to ask what that was, but I did n’t.

“ It was perfectly fine,” she began again. “ I’m sure I don’t know how I happen to

think of things. Did you notice my pink and white liberty ribbon that I had round my waist this morning? No? Then you did n't miss it when I came in? Well, where do you suppose it is now?"

I told her I did n't suppose at all, except that there was not likely to be anything supposable about it.

"I guess not! That's what makes it fine! It's round that horse's tail."

"Biddy Forsythe!"

"Yes, that's me. When he came out, — the doctor, I mean, — there it was, waving. I tied it very comfortably in a nice safe bow, and Whisker only thought it was more tail, or that he was more Whisker, and he was trying on the new effects magnificently."

"And Dr. Kinsman put up with that?"

"Very much indeed. He did n't even look surprised, — you can't surprise a doctor, I've observed, — but just got in and took the reins and drove on without a single word. I let him alone for a minute or two, for I thought he might be diagnosing. Then I said, 'We had got to pointing morals, doctor, and so I thought I would adorn a tail.'

“I was just as sober as he was, and neither of us made any further remark, but came round by the village street, as placid as you please, through a whole avenue of grins. He helped me out here very politely, and drove off home with colors flying. Only just as he started he said in a calm way, as if it had just occurred to him, ‘Suppose Whisker had kicked?’”

“‘Oh, I knew he would n’t — or you either,’ I told him, and ran in. Was n’t it a glorious stunt?”

“I suppose so,” I answered unconcernedly, as I laid down my napkin and rose from my seat, “if your glory and object in life are to make the village grin.”

Her face changed, and without a word she got up from the table. We sat a little while on the front porch, talking in a semi-detached way, as people do when real talk is over; then she said she would go home.

“I’m sure you’ve had enough of me for once, Miss Gainsworth,” was her leave-taking, “but I hope you’ll let me come again. I mean to make you like me yet.”

“I’m very willing,” I said with careful sincerity.

“Then you're at least halfway to it!” she cried with swift exultation from the doorstep. “Barkis was willin'!”

“The other half depends upon the other person,” I retorted.

“The other person may come round, but she'll have her laugh out first, if she bursts off all her buttons!”

She was on top of the low front wall as she flung me that last answer, running along to the hedge corner, beyond which she sprang to the ground on her own side, whence I heard the shrill summons to her dogs from her silver whistle.

But I knew now, for all her putting up of her whimsical defenses, that she was not impervious. When I had said that about her object in life, I had touched her, for the moment, in something deeper than her vanities. To have penetrated within the outworks at all was something.

VIII

A WORD THAT STRUCK

“I HAVEN’T any object in life.”

Biddy answered what I had said at the close of our last talk as if it were a word just spoken.

It was ten days after, and we were sitting under the big horse chestnut in the corner of the front yard, where the hedge line stops against the wall.

“Have you been thinking of that ever since?” I asked her.

“Ever since what? Ever since always. I never had any object in life. I’ve just picked up what I could get as I’ve gone along. It’s mostly nonsense. Nobody cares.”

“The way to be cared for is to care,” I answered.

She held up her head proudly. “I don’t mean to care for people who won’t care back. Why should I begin the caring?”

“I think you are living under a mistake. A great many people like you, I am sure.

Care for you, — if you would only show your best. You 're not honest to yourself, Biddy."

"Like? Oh, yes!" She caught at that word, and replied to it only. "I'm jolly, and they have a jolly liking for me, — those people in the village and about, that I'm funny and friendly with. I like them, too, or I would n't be funny and friendly. But *caring!* And people that could do it from up above me, and make me reach up. That's what I want."

I would have liked to tell her that I cared; that I was getting to feel a real affection for the best of her which I was finding out. But I could not say it then; it would have seemed like speaking from that supposed superiority and reaching down.

"Is n't that what they are trying for?" I asked her. "Would they take the trouble to find fault if it were n't to polish off a flaw from a fineness? Does n't remonstrance always imply a belief in a betterness that is behind a folly, and making appeal to that?"

"Appealing to Cæsar? Possibly. They might do that and not think much of Cæsar, either."

“Did you go on like this at Dorrington?”

I started a new departure, really wondering how she might have shaped her life at school, and what influence she might have found or felt there. I did not like to draw her forth, or let her come forth too impulsively, in the betrayal or defining of her home circumstances. I like to have people talk freely with me, but I always give them a chance to stop where I think they may wish afterward that they had. I wanted to understand Biddy Forsythe. I was eager to help her — to see herself; that was all, so I shifted the point of view.

“Oh, that was different. I behaved pretty well, generally; that is, within bounds. Life was more diffused there. You know electricity is less dangerous where it finds plenty of conduction. I did n't get overcharged — very often. And I did n't want to get sent home, you see. It made it all the worse when I did get back here. I feel all bottled up.”

I had not accomplished much by my divergence.

“People do — what they think is — their duty by me. I don't care to be done duty by. I'm not just a wire woman to have gowns

fitted onto, and to be pinned and unpinned till they suit — somebody else.”

I guessed something by this time of what Biddy covered up with her “people.” I knew she did not mean me to suppose that there was any particular individuality in her complaint. The “wire woman” illustration pointed to the feminine element in the obnoxious surveillance, but did not convince me that the sharpest pinpricks of the duty-doing process came to her from that side. I did not believe that the “belle-mère” represented to her that ideal of some one above her to whom she might be drawn to reach up.

Neither do I think that she expected the “caring,” in her full sense of it, from her stepmother. Mrs. Forsythe hardly had that kind of caring in her.

I could not help feeling that Biddy's noun of multitude and her plural pronoun referred chiefly to the one other person from whom she might have received what she looked for; with whom, because she looked and did not find, she maintained her own armed attitude of defiance and self-misrepresentation.

I suspected also, on the other hand, that

there might be something she did not know how to look for or to credit rightly; and again, that she did not altogether understand herself and the nature of the caring that should satisfy her.

“He is all the brother I ever had,” she had said, I remembered; and I remembered her little exaggerated indifference in saying it.

That he was not her brother at all, and she had no right to him that way, that he did not really belong to her life, yet her life could not do without him, — that all this was what was making her jealous and unhappy and untrue to her whole better nature, she did not suspect of herself. Or she did not mean to suspect it, and instinctively safeguarded herself with the little pathos about the “brother.”

Perceptions to this effect that had not time to be distinct as thoughts ran rapidly through my mind between her scarcely interrupted sentences.

“They only want to regulate me,” she went on, “and I object to being regulated.”

“That’s curious,” I said, smiling, “when you are so good yourself at regulating, — your dogs, for instance.”

"Why, Miss Joanna! That is n't cold regulating! I *love* my dogs, and my dogs love me."

I had no answer for that.

"Nobody *cares*," she repeated bitterly.

I was so sorry for her. I could see what she had longed for all her life, and how she thought her life had missed it.

"Your father cared," I said gently.

She started as if I had struck her. Every bit of color went out of her face. Her eyes grew wide with pain. Then she sprang to her feet, and in an instant had rushed down the garden.

What had I done? What could I do now?

She did not run away. She went down to the old apple tree, and climbed into her seat there. After a little while I got up and walked slowly toward her through the garden. I was afraid she would rush away again, and I gave her time, for I could not force myself upon her. But she did not. I came close to her and reached up my hand and laid it on her knee.

"Forgive me, Biddy. I did not mean to hurt you so. I wanted to help you."

She surprised me with such a sweet,

tender look, so utterly different from that with which she had left me, that tears rushed up behind my eyes and I could not say another word.

She put her hand upon my shoulder.

"I ought to ask your pardon," she said. "I was not angry. But I did care so for my father. And he could n't be with me all the time, you know. When he was, he could only pet me, — more than was good for me, I suppose, — to make up. He always seemed to be trying to make up to me. He knew I was n't very happy, for all my fun. I guess fathers always do know. If I had been a great deal more unhappy, — and I was only not quite happy, — I would not have troubled him with it. So he petted me, and other people did the regulating — and not much else; that was all."

"I understand," I said to her. And indeed I did.

"I think Grim was fond of me as a child, although I did use to tease him horribly. But I've outgrown all his liking. He does n't approve of me as a young woman. Grown-up perversity is worse, I suppose. And his not approving only makes me more perverse.

And he's all the brother I ever had," she ended, as she had done that other time, but without the old flippancy.

I waited a minute, and then I asked her, —

"May I speak to you of your father?" I would not do that again without her leave.

"Say anything you have to say, Miss Joanna. I think you are my friend."

"I think your father is more to you than ever — and your mother, too. I think they are both 'trying to make up' to you, only they have to get at your life through your own heart. Do for the love of them the things they would like to have you do, because *they care so!*"

She leaned over and kissed me. As she did so, I felt her catch her breath with a sob. But when she lifted her face away again it was quiet and bright.

"Good-by; I'm going home now."

She rose to her feet upon the tree trunk. She stood still an instant, then she said quaintly, with a marked intent of resuming her habitual manner, —

"You'd better do by me as you did by the hen, — pick me all off clean. You can do

it better than anybody else. There's meat under the feathers." And she laughed a little, but not with any of her old mockery, took her few well-poised, graceful steps along the tree, dropped lightly over our boundary, and was gone.

I walked up the garden, thinking much.

I wondered if I could pick off her little foibles, just the superfluity of them, and offer back the good, and the charming of her — to whom?

Perhaps to them of whom I had told her.

IX

DO THEY KNOW? DO THEY CARE?

“I’VE come to one conclusion about myself,” said Biddy Forsythe to me, in her usual way of resuming things.

“That’s good,” I answered. “Few people come to so much as that. To settle one point in anything is to make a starting-point from which the whole may be settled. What have you found out?”

“This. If I’ve one particular gift, it’s for having things come into my head that nobody else would ever think of. That’s what my disposition runs to. And then I just delight in doing something that nobody else would venture to do. Put these two things together and imagine them turned to something worth while. Do you see? I begin to guess what the rattling brook has been dammed up for. It’s meant to run some kind of a mill some time. Supposing I should make up my mind it shall?”

“Biddy, you’re fine!”

“I don’t know. I have n’t found out the fine thing yet. But I’ve some idea I may quit rattling round and look for it. Where there’s a dam there’s a sluiceway, generally. I think I should like to pitch into something that needed to be pitched into, or to defy something that deserved to be defied, and that most folks give into because they are afraid or won’t take the trouble.”

“You *are* fine! You’re on the right tack!” I exclaimed, delighted. “And you need n’t look very long or very far. The sluiceway is right beside the dam. There are things waiting all around for somebody to take up and deal with. Only don’t pitch in for the sake of the pitching. There’s plenty of that being done already, and the things only wait the longer, and are made the worse. The newspapers are full of them.”

“I’ll come to you before I pitch. And now I want to ask you something else.”

But she did not ask it right away. She sat silent, and let that branch of the conversation drop from connection before she said, —

“Do you really think, Miss Joanna, that people do know — or care — after they get away from here, about what happens to us?”

"I am perfectly sure about the caring," I answered. "How much they may possibly know, in all particulars, we cannot attempt to say. We are not given to know all, here; only as much as we can take a part in, or as really touches in intent and affection our own life, and so concerns us that we can understand. To know more than that would burden us beyond what we could bear. But the true caring never stops. I do not think it ever *can* stop, if people are alive at all. How could they be themselves, and not keep the very heart of themselves?"

"But we do know things here that we can't change nor meddle with, and that is what makes unhappy lives. If they know more than we do, and can't help, that other life would be dreadful. It would be better to stop everything."

"Would we stop everything just because we could n't help everything, and all at once? Or would we rather go on caring and hoping and trying, even *bearing*, if there were nothing else left?"

"But I thought they were to be perfectly happy."

"I think they are — as happy as they

individually can be. To be happy is to be fitted to our haps. Haps are chances, — opportunities. And there's a likeness, if not an etymological connection, between 'hap' and 'halpe,' or 'help.' I believe that help is laid upon them, and that is what they are happy in. It is their work, their errand. Did you ever see the Scottish version of the Psalms?"

"No. Is it a book?"

"Yes. I have it. It is a rendering into the Scottish dialect, and some of the words and expressions are wonderful interpretations. In it the word 'angel' is given as 'errand-rinner.'"

"Why, that's lovely! But it doesn't prove that our *own* people are sent on errands to *us*."

"Why not? What else is so likely, in natural order? And I think it is proved by other facts. The Lord came straight back to his own, and He promised to stay with them. It seems as if all the heavenly work was done by messengers. The Heavenly Father 'laid help' upon his Son. And 'every good and perfect gift *comes down* from the Father of Lights,' — all the way

through heaven, I think, by every loving connection in which spirits and hearts and lives are 'own' to each other. It does not seem as if there were any other way. Kin and kind are the same thing, in their reality. Every dear, good thing comes as it has always come. The lines are not broken off. They were not made to be broken. All the love there is is God's love, and He has always worked by it through human hearts. There is 'no variableness nor shadow of turning,' you know."

Biddy sat silent.

"And there is another thing," I began again, thinking aloud what I had so often thought to myself. "We have to leave so much unfinished when we go away from here — so much has failed — for a while. We have made mistakes ; we have not always understood. We have lived so imperfectly. When we get into that light and *see*, I think we shall want to *do*. And I believe the very things we shall be set to do will be what will finish, and make up, and mend, and help, and so make us happy. We could n't be happy until it was done or doing. And the giving chance and power

for, is the for-giving. I think the work will be easy and beautiful for some, and for others it may be more like what we call punishment: it will take so long, and be so hard, and there will be so much to bear, and so many bitter consequences to follow out first."

Biddy's face illumined suddenly.

"Then people here can help *them*, by being ready to be helped!" she exclaimed, like one finding and grasping a jewel. "Why, it's like offerings for the sake of the dead, and praying souls out of purgatory."

How quick the child was with her understanding and her answers!

"I think that may be the secret truth of all those traditions. The whole calendar of saints has grown from the first belief in continued relations of help and love."

"I suppose," said Biddy slowly, "it is the whole of Christianity."

There was no need of going any further.

We were sitting together in my room, sewing. We had reached the upstairs intimacy. That means, with us women, a great deal.

We sat and sewed without any more talk for perhaps ten minutes. Then I went and fetched a plate of cookies, for I felt as if we needed a break into common things.

And as I did so I remembered how our Lord himself turned from his highest words and acts to ordinary interests and needs, and meant that we should do so, without thinking it a "break."

X

AREN'T YOU AFRAID?

I BEGAN to feel about this time as if I were getting to be a kind of neighborhood clearing-house, people coming in to me with all their accounts and drafts and checks, and expecting me to help settle their balances.

I wonder if it would n't be a good new industry for single women, if the right ones would engage in it! Come to think of it, is n't it a business already, which every mutual duty and opportunity in the world is — a good, square, legitimate business, needed and demanded for general straightening and convenience? Anyway, it seemed as if I were getting into it.

I had had experience of it before, in odd and casual ways; but since I had, according to Martha Blunt, "taken up Biddy Forsythe," — though I think it was the other way, and she had taken me up, — I had apparently become a sort of centre toward

which converged all the interest and pursuant inquiry that concerned itself with her. I had to be answerable, somehow, to several persons on her account. They all thought I "knew" what they could only surmise about; that I had "influence" and the inside track. Did I think thus and so? Was this quite true, as they had heard it had happened? What had Biddy Forsythe meant by that? As if I had got inside her "little mind," and had the clue to all its labyrinths, and could find a thoroughfare through its baffling blind alleys!

The best of them — the rector and the doctor, with their stories of the swine and the germs, and their friendly satisfaction that Biddy came to me for countenance and counsel, and their confidence that I had confidence in the best of her in which they believed — would come and talk her over with me, and suggest and explain and question and defer to me, until I did not know whether I had rushed in where an angel might fear to tread, or whether some angel had deputed to me a bit of an errand.

Merely curious people, who wanted talk

to go away with and make more talk, I knew how to deal with. They raised no uncertainty in my mind as to what I had better say or not say, or whether I myself might be meddling or marring if I acted in any way on a supposed responsibility, or accepted an implied authority.

Sometimes I was not so sure, and I tried to be very wary, as when Mrs. Meridon of Birch Hill — whose daughter, a thoroughly nice girl of the nicest class, had taken a fancy to Bidy and wanted to know her better — asked me delicately and seriously if I could tell her what all these odd little stories about her meant.

To her I answered that I thought they only meant odd ways of showing strong capacity for very admirable things, under a sense of humor and a quick invention which had not yet found their suitable range. And shortly after that I learned, much pleased, that Constance Meridon had had Bidy over to luncheon in an intimate way; and from Bidy's own account of her visit I inferred that she had been on her best behavior, and her "lovely time" must have been lovely on both sides.

But Mrs. Meridon was an exception. Impertinent interviewers — for interviewing is by no means confined to representatives of the press, who often deserve a far more gracious designation and more courteous treatment than these private inquisitors — would question in a subdued, cautious way whether I thought there was “anything between Bidly and young Maclyn;” and — still more subduedly and cautiously — whether there could be “anything strained in the relations between Bidly and Mrs. Forsythe,” and “what they were all talking of breaking up for?”

In such instances I generally met inquiry with inquiry, in shrewd Yankee fashion. “Do you think it is important we should know?” I would ask calmly. And that turned back the faucet, and stopped the flow of conversation.

Things seemed to keep happening right around me, and in my own little daily concerns, which mixed me up more and more with Bidly, and made me more and more the involuntary depositary and general adjuster of Forsythe affairs through the accumulating small items that Bidly's

doings continued to furnish and of which she made me confidante, and indeed very often "magna pars."

One Friday morning I got a letter by the early mail which interfered with my ordinary punctuality in dressing and breakfasting. I cannot do much important thinking and at the same time proceed promptly with common routine. I brushed my teeth for several unnecessary minutes while I pondered the question the letter had raised in my mind. I went from toilet table to wardrobe, back and forth, forgetting what I had started for, or what to do with it when I had got it. I held my cap — the wrong one — obviously in my hand while I deliberated a fresh doubt and a possible solution.

Could I go up to Northmead the next day, and stay over Sunday and Monday? It was such short notice, and so many little things would have to be arranged, above all, my Sunday-school class.

An old friend who had been a schoolmate with me at Northmead before there was a girls' college there, and who lived in the old town still, married long ago to one of its leading men, wrote me that another old

schoolmate with whom we had both been intimate—and an intimacy of three is under some circumstances more strongly intimate than one of two — was spending a few precious days with her at the close of a home visit from a North China mission, where she had been teaching for nearly twenty years. Would I come for an over-Sunday with them?

It seemed both as if I must do it and as if I could n't possibly. The greatest trouble would be the Sunday-school class. That weighed upon my conscience, and the railroad journey on my nerves. Between the two was the involved conscience question of which, really, I was going to let tip the scale. Pressing upon me against both, was the sincerely eager desire to be once more with my old friends. It is really terrible to want and not to want, to ought and not to ought.

Dr. Christieson was unluckily away from home. He would be back on Saturday night, in time to preach, but there was no chance for me to explain to him and get him to arrange. I could not bother him at the last minute.

I had nobody to talk to. I did not care

to speak of it to Martha Blunt until I could see my own way through and simply give her my orders, for I do take my own way and give my orders, whatever may be suspected of the reversed working in our domestic economy. I only prefer to get my mind quite firmly made up before taking her into my counsels. My way through, in this case, however I should manage it, I felt instinctively, with all my perturbation, must be on the railroad to the midland city.

Sarah Armstead had been within the radius of danger all through the terrible Boxer rising, and she was going bravely back to her post, to face future contingencies. Of course I must see her, and Laura Monroe would never forgive me if I did not.

Just as I had finished my somnambule meal, the items of which I knew not as I ate, Bidy Forsythe walked in on my dilemma.

We had exchanged only two sentences when she saw that my mind, if anywhere, was somewhere else.

“What is it, Miss Joanna? You are n't here at all. Has anything happened to you, — or Martha Sharp or Yellow Daffy?”

"Nothing very distressing," I said.

"Only very distracting. Well, you can confide in me if you want to."

And then I did confide in her, whether weakly and mistakenly or not I did not know then, or with clear assurance for a good many days after.

"Of course you'll go," she said when I had finished. "There simply is n't anything else for you to do. It's only a question of ways and means."

"Ah, but that *is* the question. My Sunday-school class — what *can* I do about that? Those boys can't be left, and there's never a teacher to spare. And Dr. Christieson away!"

"He'll be back again. You just leave it to me. When the sky fell, Chicken Little went and told the king. I'll see Dr. Christie the minute he gets home — and before. I'll meet him at the train. We'll settle it somehow. I'll tell you what," she added, with sudden inspiration, "I'll take the class myself!"

"Biddy! What would you do with all those boys?"

"Tell me the lesson. I'll read it up. I

can expound. I know what you 're afraid of. You won't trust me. I guess Dr. Christieson will. Can't you leave it to him?"

That did suggest a possibility.

"You would be sure to see him about it first?" I queried. A vague imagination had seized me of her sudden appearance in my place, and assumption of command in some fashion of her own not to be foreseen.

"Why, of course. I should n't undertake to step right into a captain's place without a commission. I know better than that. I should n't expect my company to behave. I'll have all proper authority. You need n't be scared."

Still I hesitated, though I thanked her. I should have to go away taking everything for granted. How should I know the rector had approved?

"I'm afraid I *am* afraid," I said honestly. "Are n't you afraid yourself?"

"Not a little bit," she answered.

"Would you remember that it is a *trust*?"

"Well, I don't know. I thought a trust was something very apt to be disreputable, a combination to cheat and ruin innocent

and ignorant people, and that President Roosevelt was down upon it. I should n't like to displease him; I may go to Washington before he's out of the White House. No, Dr. Christieson and I won't combine."

"You irrepessible thing! Won't you be serious?"

"As serious as the dog-star — or as the Sun-Day itself — when Sunday comes. But this is Friday. Friday's a fast day."

"I think you never have any slow ones. I wish I could believe in you."

"You know you do. You would n't care to if you could n't."

The end of it was that I told her the lesson would be the story of Jacob and Esau, and that I packed my straw telescope and started early the next morning for Topthorpe and the forenoon train westward. It was a foregone conclusion.

XI

TRAIN TALK

A SMALL suburban train is more or less a little social exchange. Neighborhood people drift together, seat themselves in twos and fours, and chat the half hour or so away. Things trivial and weighty are aired and discussed. Bits of gossip, arguments and opinions, political and commercial events, are ventilated and canvassed, from the last war news in the East to the last outbreak in the kitchen. Advertisement and comment in every sort get circulated. When you think of it, this on-the-way interval and intercourse seems to have become an institution of the time, self-evolved, — a curious kind of incidental caucus, and a considerable, though unreckoned, agency in our public and private affairs — if any are left that can be called private. Accordingly, one needs to bear carefully in mind one's environment.

One group is apt to forget that other twos

and fours are near. Scraps of conversation, disjointed sentences, are caught and carried away, like seeds by the fowls of the air, or the microbes by everybody, to develop and do their work elsewhere.

I am always a little afraid and cautious when personal topics are touched, especially when certain bright people get alongside, with whom caution may be beguiled to give way to entertainment. A great deal is picked up in the cars besides what is taken to the left-and-lost room for safe-keeping until properly identified and relegated.

Returning from Northmead on Tuesday, and coming out to Overbrook on the afternoon train, I found myself in the seat behind Miss Persis Pratt, and diagonal to her, so that she nodded easily across and gave me familiar greeting. She looked full of something, as she generally does. She knows all about it usually; if not, she is keen after knowledge. Either way, the subject gets aired.

I wonder if among all the rest of her cognizances, she is aware of her own sobriquet. Bidy Forsythe invented it, and everybody chuckles over it; not mali-

ciously, for Miss Persis is not herself malicious, therefore deserves no malice. She is only very wide awake, and pretty sharp sometimes. She is just Persistent Prattle. It fits exactly, and she is very amusing — when you have n't any tender spot that she happens to touch.

When young Mrs. Cheswold, who had come to Overbrook within the year, took the end seat in front of me beside Miss Persis, that lady made room for her with cheerful affability. She is always interested in our new people, as a naturalist in new species, and they are generally a good deal impressed by her. She turned sidewise, and spoke across Mrs. Cheswold's shoulder to me.

“ Well, really, Miss Gainsworth — Miss Gainsworth, do you know Mrs. Cheswold ? ” And we other two bowed. So the little car party was made up, and Miss Persis could comfortably proceed with her bringing out of things old and new for our mutual understanding and enlivenment.

“ You did a fine thing for us last Sunday, — by proxy,” she continued to me. “ You were brilliantly represented.”

I began to quake, but I answered composedly, "I thought I should be."

"It was quite a little scene," pursued Miss Persistent.

Like other unfortunates threatened with electrocution, I grasped spasmodically the live wire that touched me. I found no power of letting go. "What happened?" I asked, and realized instantly that I had succumbed to my catastrophe in the very effort to hold myself in confident command.

"Class in a roar, and school broken up; that was all. At least, that was all I found out about it then. I asked Dr. Christieson, and he only said that Miss Biddy had been strikingly illustrative, and the boys had been strikingly appreciative. He'll tell you about it, I suppose. I guess I may as well leave it to him."

If she had found out anything about it since, — and there were all the boys, and I could not imagine Miss Persis quiescently ignorant, — she evidently meant to tease me into an uneasy curiosity before relieving my mind — and her own. But I seized the happy instant of the miraculously interrupted current, and dropped the wire.

Whatever had happened, I would not let it be made train talk of.

“I guess you may,” I answered. “I can wait very well. I’ve no doubt it was all right.” And I diverted further danger by a dexterously rapid new connection. There are a good many stops to Miss Pratt’s organ. I just pushed one in hard, and pulled out another, and she piped on readily.

I am very well aware that I have strung two different metaphors on one thread, but they both seem to me so expressive that I do not want to give up either. I hate being bound by rules of rhetoric or even logic.

I touched her up on a topic of her own.

“I’ve hardly seen you this summer,” I said. “I’ve wanted to ask you how the improvements had turned out. Have the automobiles been as bad as you expected?”

The palpable break did not disturb Miss Persis. She probably thought I was inwardly tormented, and took refuge in bravado and retaliation. I am afraid I was a little unkind, for the improvement of Briery Lane, midway of which stands her very pleasant little cottage, is a real grievance to her, and

I think with reason. But I was on the defensive and in a hurry, and her grievance is her hobby, and I knew I could trot her off upon it. I think that people who talk a good deal and are clever at it do get over their grievances — even some of their pains and sorrows — by smart or affecting statements of them, and that they may even come to be so dependent upon these as not to be able to spare them out of their repertory of entertaining or pathetic material.

Briery Lane is Miss Pratt's *pièce de résistance*, by which I mean that she never can resist telling her story of it, especially to a fresh auditor, and that no auditor need attempt, on the other part, resistance to the recital.

I am tempted to put it in here as she gave it, although it does not directly relate to the episodes I have in hand, because it is really rather funny, and because through that very want of relation I had reason to be grateful to it for the remainder of that trip.

Briery Lane is, or was, when it was Briery Lane, — it is now Greenway Street, so named anew, Miss Persis says, because they have taken all the green away out of it, — one of

the prettiest bits in Overbrook. It was a little byroad between Brookside and Birch Hill, and was full of romping greenery;—barberry bushes and sumachs and sweet-blossoming locust trees. I always loved Miss Pratt for loving her pretty natural surroundings so. I think they just suited her own temperament, with their bright colors and their little thorns, whether she realized it or not. And I did not wonder that when the Highway Department got up the project of widening the lane, and clearing the sideways, and making concrete walks, and assessing betterments, and turning the quiet little remnant of rustic beauty into a denuded thoroughfare, very probably to be trolley-invaded, between Brookside Village and Birch Hill and the threatened boulevard around Broad Pond, Miss Persis was stirred out of her normal composure, which means being very much stirred up indeed; the more so, because her Briery Lane neighbors—there were three other residents, though she owned the greatest part of the land, and was sublimely indifferent to advanced values—were not stirred up at all, at least on her side.

“Value of land! Betterments and taxes! Put one against the other, and where are you with any certainty? Out in the broil and the dust, with bicycles and automobiles rampaging over you, and you trying to outlive yourself, to get a profit on what you don't want to sell!” And I think she stated it pretty fairly as well as forcibly. Yes, I do like Miss Persis, only I don't want her to tread on my toes.

I gathered my toes carefully back, and leaned away into my own corner, withdrawing from the car party, after Miss Pratt had replied to my deflecting question.

“Automobiles! I should think so! And bicycles, clouds and torrents of them! Clouds and torrents of macadam powder, too! My house and carpets and furniture and bread and butter are all macadamized, to say nothing of my throat and lungs. I've been granite-crushed and steam-rolled and water-carted till I'm improved out of my life, and I wish all the Street Department had to swallow their own dust, or that all their dust—. Did you ever hear about old Dunby Crain and me at the town meeting March before last, Mrs. Cheswold?”

And then she was launched, and I settled back out of it, as I have said.

“ I never went to a town meeting before, and I don't think I ever shall again. I don't want to vote, but I don't want to sit still and hear the old Dunky-Brains vote things up and down, and spoil the town, and send the tax bills to us poor orphan spinsters. I did rather depend that day on Dunky, for they say he regularly opposes all the scattering appropriations, and they wanted three thousand extra on streets for this unrighteous job. I thought it would be fun to hear him, and it might help. There was one good man on our side, Gorham Lewis, and it seemed as if between the two it might get staved off. But it did n't; it was staved right on. Old Dunky had the last word upon it, and it was such a ridiculous word that it just sponged out all Gorham Lewis had said. Just before, they had had a scrap over the cemetery article. Dunky was down upon that; I mean he was up, and stamped on it. He said he 'd like to know what good there was in voting more money every year to spend amongst the graves. He wanted what was necessary and decent and orderly, but

he did n't go in for decoratin' an' lan'skeep gard'nin', where there was n't no livin' soul to enjoy it. It warn't half on 't put into the ground, neither. It went into the pipes and the dinner pails of the loafers that lay round smokin' an' eatin' and restin' all through the middle of the day, stretchin' their noonin' at both ends, and takin' breathin' spells between every two spadefuls they dug, an' before 'n' after every loadin' an' unloadin' of their carts, an' nobody lookin' after 'em to time 'em or keep 'em to their job. 'Now 'tain't so on the streets,' he said. And there he came to it. I'd forgotten his teams and his men, and his contracts with the town. 'There 's good money's worth done there, every time,' he told 'em. 'I don't never begrutch the highway properash'n. There ain't a cent nor a minute wasted where Luke Handerson is. He 's a right down smart man, an' keeps his squads lively. I wish 't we had Luke Handerson up at the cemetery!'

“Well, I wish we had, and you with him!’ I said, up in the gallery. I made that one speech, but I don't think they heard me downstairs, for they were all laughing, and hustling about too, for they 'd had about

town meeting enough, and Brierly Lane improvement was fifty-four on the warrant, and all cut and dried in the committee meeting beforehand, and they wanted to get off with their town-meeting cake to their suppers. So the vote was put and carried, and Dunky shuffled off with his two bun-loaves in yellow paper under his arm, and I did n't stay any longer, but hurried home to get a last look at the dear old brown ruts and the bushes, for I expected to find a gang of men and tipcarts at my gate ahead of me."

Here the brakeman called out "O-o-ve-brook!" and I got up to go. As I waited a moment behind the slow line of passengers in the aisle, Miss Pratt, whose station was at the next stop, leaned forward. She had another shot in her locker.

"Did you know Maria Briggs had got a new shop-girl?" she called to me. "I was in there yesterday, and Biddy Forsythe came from the back room behind the counter, and measured me off five yards of taffeta ribbon."

XII

JACOB AND ESAU

“How did you get on with my boys?” I asked of Bidy herself, in a perfectly inapprehensive way, when she came over to the cottage the next day.

“Delightfully. It was as easy as possible — after a while. They expounded to me.”

“Really! On what points?”

“Points of honor — and points of the game.”

“The game! What game?”

“Well, I won’t make you drag it out of me with whats and exclamation points. I’ll tell you all about it. You see — I suppose you’ve found out — they are just boys, — clear, unmitigated boys; and I had to meet them on their own ground, which was — the diamond.”

“Bidy, don’t try to puzzle me. Tell me what you’ve been up to.”

“Well, I was up to them. I saw it was

up to me to be that, and I was. It was simply this way.

“I had read up all about Esau that I could find in Smith and Scott; and I really meant to interest the boys in him and his wild ways, which I liked better—and knew they would—than the smug selfishness of that old stay-at-home-and-feather-his-nest Jacob. I meant to bring out, too, what I truly suppose is the gist of the whole story, and what it is put into the Bible for. Ever since I had my talk with Dr. Christie about the pigs, I’ve learned to look underneath the story for the *raison d’être*,—and it’s generally worth looking for, and great fun sometimes.

“I had looked up Edom, and posted myself about Esau’s haunts and ranges, that afterward were his kingdom; and I began with talking about the tent life of Isaac and his family in the pasture country, and then the cave and mountain wilderness life of the wild people of Edom; and then I got to the place where the pottage story comes in.

“The trouble was that they knew all that before, or thought they did, and they began

to skip, mentally and physically. Boys generally do both when they do one, you know. There were snickers and kicks and pushing and whispers, and I found I was talking to a little crowd that meant to snicker me down. I did n't give in at first; but when I found that treating things as incidental, and gently hinting that silence and attention was their part of the performance were useless, and when I stopped short at last, and perceived that nobody was ashamed, but that this was precisely what they wanted, I took up different tactics.

“ ‘You don't seem interested,’ I said.

“ ‘No!’ said Bob Meridon, right out, quite loud. Bob and Jack Ward were the ringleaders. I saw I had to deal with them. ‘You don't care about Jacob and Esau?’

“ ‘You bet!’ said Bob and Jack together, and the rest of the class agreed by a snickering vote.

“ ‘What *do* you care for?’

“ ‘Baseball!’ Bob Meridon almost shouted.

“ ‘I shut up the Bible. ‘We'll talk about baseball, then,’ I said; and a general shuffle together along the bench, and a converged stare at me answered that. I

saw I had got them. Now the thing was to hold on.

“ ‘I suppose,’ I remarked, looking confidently at my row — or bunch — of boys, as if I, instead of they, were to be interested and instructed, ‘that there’s a good square way of playing baseball, — on honor and all fair, — and there are ways in which there might be cheating. I should like to know something about the rules and chances. I like games, and I wish you would tell me all you can. I’ll be very quiet, and listen politely.’

“Even then, though they did laugh at my changing positions with them, and putting myself on good behavior, they did not ‘catch on’ to all I meant. They were delightedly full of their new subject. They began chattering very fast, and I listened as I had promised, and turned to one and another of them as rapidly as I could follow their rapid alternations, never letting out that I knew pretty nearly as much about it as they did; and they told me this and that of tricks that might be done, and had been done, but were pretty risky and could n’t often be tried now, since all the laws had

been laid down so fine, and umpiring was so sharp; but still a fellow could be mean, and a mean fellow would be.

“‘Well, how?’ I wanted to know all about it. My pursuit of knowledge was very — *Persistent*.

“One way was ‘signals,’ they told me; ‘kind of a private coach among the outsiders. A fellow can be put through by an old hand — sometimes a professional, though he’s apt to be spotted — tilting his hat up or down, or shifting a little on his seat one way or the other — any old thing agreed on, to tell when to run or get back to base, and so on. And then there are tricks in touching out. Getting between a fellow and the base, or tripping him up, or plunging down upon him when he’s making a slide, or giving him a kick with a spiked heel — but that’s the nastiest trick of all,’ said Jack Ward. ‘Nobody but a mucker would do that.’

“‘There’s been a nastier one,’ said Bob Meridon. ‘You remember that time, year before last, when Bowles played Brixman? One of the Bowles team’ — he turned to me with this story — ‘took a bribe from a

Brixman to give away the game, and he did it — for a *dollar!* It was found out, and they were both shunted off the nines. That was meanness, if you like, way down underground! But I think the meanest little cuss of the two was the fellow that did the hirin’.

“ ‘I’m very much obliged to you, Bob,’ I said gravely. ‘I think so too. And it just brings us back to this other mean little cuss.’ I opened the Bible again. The class stared and exploded.

“ Every head in the school turned round to us. Dr. Christie rang the bell, fully five minutes too soon, for general exercise. I suppose he considered that general exercise had already begun. But I could n’t help it. And it was pretty hard on me, for I had to squeeze my ‘application’ into a dozen words, like a cablegram, while the classes were settling and my boys still on the grin. I’d like to know what it was that Dr. Christie said to Bob afterward. They both looked — well, a little as if general exercise were going to begin over again.”

Biddy stopped there, and I did not ask her what her “application” had been. I thought I would rather learn from the boys

themselves what they had made out of it, and I imagine Bidly left it so purposely, knowing that I would, and preferring that results in their minds should complete the impression on mine, rather than her own report of her moral climax.

It all came round to me. That check came in promptly. Dr. Christieson called later that week, and presented it among other accounts.

"I suppose you have heard of Miss Bidly's last?" he said. I doubted that, I told him, not having heard from her since Wednesday, and that being two days ago.

The doctor laughed. I think he was much obliged to me for my little joke, as I meant he should be. It mitigated the gravity of the situation, and made excuse for some touch of the inevitable amusement in the discussion of the whole affair.

"I must congratulate you on your understudy," he remarked, with that odd little unclerical twinkle in his kindly eyes.

"Oh, you mean her lesson to my class," I responded, as awakening to comprehension. "Yes. I believe it did produce a remarkable effect."

“A quite startling one. The whole school got the benefit, partially. I’m thinking of giving them the rest of it next Sunday. I asked Bob Meridon about it, quite in a friendly way. ‘What was it you all laughed at so?’ I put the question that way, as if there must have been justifiable reason, instead of attacking the misdemeanor. He seemed quite delighted to answer me. ‘Miss Forsythe called Jacob a mean little cuss. And so he was,’ he said, looking me daringly in the face, and laughing again with the fresh tickle of the words. I don’t know what he expected of me, but I remarked quietly, ‘I think he was myself. But the Lord made something of him, after all. I think that is what He took him up for.’

“‘That’s just what Miss Forsythe said, only you did n’t give her much time for that part of it. She said he was about the meanest man in the whole Bible, and the Lord picked him out for the toughest job, to show what He could do for the rest of us.’

“I doubt if Miss Bidy expressed it in just those words, though she may have done so. At any rate, she conveyed the idea in a sufficiently striking way, and it took hold.”

This was pretty nearly the "application" I had expected. The doctor and I were looking at each other appreciatively.

"Don't you think Biddy might as well keep my class?" I asked him.

He rubbed his chin. "Or take another?" he asked in return. "Quite possibly, all in good time. When you have carried her a little further along in her preparatory courses."

"How you all do give Biddy over to me!" I exclaimed.

"How she has given herself over to you, Miss Joanna!" said the doctor. "I think the responsibility rests with you. And it appears to be in very good hands."

"I'm getting my hands pretty full, doctor."

"Good, trustworthy, strong ones; and ambidextrous, I think."

XIII

MARIA BRIGGS : AND MRS. LIPPITT

Mrs. FORSYTHE's man, Shawe, came to my door one forenoon with a message of inquiry. Was Miss Forsythe here?

I told him no. I had not seen her to-day. I was a little nettled that I should be hunted up on her account. It was something like being asked, as a servant might be, if I had "done anything" with a missing article. I suppose I was unreasonable, but there is a tone in things that one feels without the audible note being struck.

If she should come in, would I please tell her that Madame Forsythe wanted her?

That was perfectly polite, and I answered with perfect but remote politeness that I would. And in half an hour Bidy came, on her way home from the village. I gave the message.

"Oh, I know," she said. There was no mistaking *her* tone. It was that of a wearied annoyance. "She wants the carriage and

horses, and the coachman, and she wants me. She's going out on a social raid, and she wants the complete outfit. I'm to make duty calls with her. And I had promised — Miss Joanna, I'm engaged. I can't do it."

"Are you sure? If she wants you, may n't they be duty calls for you?"

"I don't know. They are so wretchedly tiresome. They don't mean anything but semiannual exchange of pasteboard. They don't lead up to anything but getting more bored, and making more pretenses of skin-deep — what-d'-ye-call-'ems? They are n't friendships, they are n't even acquaintances, with anything but houses and clothes and tea-sets. You don't get inside, even when you don't get off with leaving cards. If there are any insides, you're never let clear in. It is n't life, nor any touch with life. I like the village better. I like people who are grabbing hold of something, and who let you take an interest, and perhaps help grab."

"But, my dear Biddy, there are a great many people in society who are real and alive — inside in themselves and outside in work. There is a great deal of grabbing —

taking hold of things—nowadays, in strong, effectual earnest. Tea-sets and gowns and pasteboard are not the whole of it.”

“It seems to me they have to be, if you undertake the whole round of what you’re expected to do, and how you’re expected to look. The other thing is another profession. And that is so much ‘organized’ that it turns to a round and a perfunction again.”

“What a word!”

“It’s a good one, and means the very thing, if it is n’t in the dictionary. I’ve just made it, as Gail Hamilton wrote to the proof-reader against his correction, ‘Not in the English language.’ What I insist on is that I like real individual, natural, intimate acquaintances and chances, and taking hold and helping, and that I have the right to choose. I like to go and read ‘Rudder Grange’ and ‘Pomona’s Travels’ and ‘Cranford’ to Maria Briggs while she trims her bonnets, and make her laugh with her mouth full of pins. That’s what I had promised to do this afternoon. She was shop-ridden all this morning, or I should n’t be here now.”

“I’m going down street myself this after-

noon. I will go in and explain to her," I said.

"How do you know you will have anything to explain? I have n't given in yet."

"Go home and see your mother."

"Not till I've had a cooky. And she is n't — she's belle-mère."

"Bidly!"

"She likes the name — just as she likes to call me 'Linda.' It gets round a difficulty, and turns a preposterousness into an elegance. I'd just as lief be elegant, to please her, when I can be as well as not."

"Bidly, you're incorrigible."

"Not at all. I'm sweetly corrigible — by the right people. But I never expect to be genteelly correct."

"Go home and see your mother," I repeated.

And like the recalcitrant young person in Scripture, she went.

In the afternoon the Forsythe landau rolled by, and Bidly waved her parasol from it toward the cottage. I put on my bonnet and made an errand to Maria Briggs's shop. I went down the short, pretty way through the lane from the orchard, for

Maria's shop is on the lane corner of Main Street, and I had no other possible business on Main Street, nor any at this corner, until I had examined my thread and tape box, and found that one or two widths and numbers might with timely foresight be replenished.

Big Brook runs down through the village, crossing the street and the lane this side of their joining, and is bridged for both, a broad stone and gravel structure over the highway and a narrow planking for foot passage from bank to bank of the other intersection. There are two or three small tidy houses on this lane-way, occupying the cut-off patch between the village and my limits, all having once belonged to the Forsythe estate, and these dwellings having been built by Biddy's great-grandfather for his workmen when his old-fashioned business was accumulating the fortune since increased by modern methods of investment. The houses, kept in thrifty repair, still belong to the Forsythe property, and are always well let to respectable tenants. They have bits of garden, and the field spaces behind them are nicely fenced and grassed. It is a quiet little nook, a kind of close, much

valued by its occupants as a bit of refined seclusion out of the bustle of the village.

Big Brook is the boundary line between two suburbs—ours of Overbrook, and the larger one, Longplains, between us and the city.

Maria Briggs's shop fronts upon the street; but a side and a back door open respectively on lane and garden; in the corner between them and communicating with the shop is a cosy little workwoman's parlor, where Maria sits and trims her bonnets, and lets her friends come in and sit down with her—her very intimate ones in work hours, when silks and ribbons, feathers and flowers lie about in pretty confusion, suggestive of more creatable beauty than present conglomerate fashions allow.

In summer time and pleasant weather, these two doors stand open into the greenery; and the air of the fields and the sweet smell about the running water make a pleasantness and restfulness apart from the dust and roll of the roadway, quite like a country spot, as Maria said, into which they could get away for the season. It is a yearly migration from town life, to which with

closed doors and little storm porches the house is shut in through the long cold months. I did not wonder that Biddy liked to come here, although the Forsythe glades and lawns and shrubberies gave variety and range and an amplitude of privacy of which this showed only a small, happy hint. But it was just this human hint, of a wholly and practically realized delight, which made it mean what it did, more than acres of shorn and velvety turf, and hedges trimmed in shape, and set rounds and lines of gorgeous blossom. I think my odd girl has a peculiar capacity for entering into such bits of life, which are, as she says, "real," and not "parady" with splendor and *grande tenue*, and a luxury that has overgrown simple enjoyment.

I found Maria, as I thought I should, sitting near her garden door in the little back parlor. It was with this expectation I had come by the lane-way. She saw me, of course, as I stepped down from the rough stile that some displaced stones of my wall had made available for even my inadvertent feet; and she asked me in kindly by that entrance, offering me a chair from

which she gathered up some plumes and chiffons.

“Are you in any hurry?” she asked me, “or will you rest a minute while I just fasten these puffs that I’ve got my finger on?”

She had on her knee a marvelous construction after the latest exaggeration of the fashion plates—a thing that looked much like a wash-basin foaming full of iridescent soapsuds which boiled up from a hollow that was supposed to fit a head, though upside down as to that relation, and billowed over one side of the brim in a great bubbly heap, out of which stuck up a bunch of quills of a flamingo red.

I assured her I was in no hurry, not even to do my small errand that day; but while I spoke I suppose I gazed with the amazement I felt at her miracle of millinery, for she replied in a double way, to look and speech:—

“Thank you. I don’t like it myself. I have to make things as I don’t like them. I guess most trades have to do that, more or less, book-makers and sermon-makers and law-makers, as well as milliners. It’s

adapting ourselves, taking the world as we find it, and doing as it will let us. All very well, if we can only edge along a little so as to leave it a bit better. I try to, when I get a chance. I say to myself, 'It's no use to go *clear* ahead in anything. Be contented to make folks take a single step, if you can't coax 'em to run a mile' — But, *really*, it's pretty hard to have this sort of thing laid entirely to me!"

And she held up the mass now made fast, with a ludicrous look of mingled scorn and self-pity.

I tried to put in a reconciling word.

"Probably it expresses the person it is made for," I said, "and so far it is your success. It suits her as she is at present. It will harmonize with all the rest of her, as a really better thing would not. She has got to keep on expressing herself honestly until she comes to something finer. And no doubt you can help her, an inch or two at a time, as you have said."

"I have toned her down an inch or two on this, though you would n't think it. *Finer?* What could be finer?" And she turned it round on her fist with mock ad-

miration. "What could be puffier or redder or flaringer or stunninger?"

"Nothing, very much, unless a rushing, steaming, roaring red-devil of an automobile. And I should think it might frighten horses quite as much," I said, taking up her tone and intensifying it.

Then we both laughed, and Maria Briggs helped me opportunely by adverting to Biddy.

"It's for that dressy little Mrs. Collander, the tinman's wife. Miss Forsythe says it tintinnabulates. She's always saying funny things. See here! What do you think she called *that*?" And she leaned back and reached into a deep drawer that stood open behind her, and brought "that" forth.

It was an explosion, in black and smoke-color and fire; black ostrich plumes, towering high and overhanging, from amid a tempestuous cloud-whirl of gray gauze that filled the regulation scoop-out behind the erratic brim; central to this a spout of burnt orange, in a stiff ribbon loop and an aigrette that blazed luridly against the black and gray.

"Mont Pelée in eruption!" I exclaimed.

“Exactly,” answered Maria Briggs. “Did she tell you?”

“No, unless telepathically. I was instantly impressed.”

“I dare say. Miss Forsythe has a way of impressing. I’ve no doubt she left her own impression with it, and everybody who sees it will say ‘volcano!’ right off. It’s for Mrs. Ike Martin, the blacksmith’s widow. She’s throwing off her black.”

“In terrific volume. Her grief must have been tremendous,” I answered gravely.

I did not see why I should have been under absent influence in a matter so very palpable, and I was but half pleased that Maria Briggs should so suggest. Obvious as it was, my comparison was my own. But I let that pass. It pleased me to notice that Bidley’s friendliness and funniness had not made the well-bred milliner pretentiously familiar. It spoke well for both, the right sort of breeding on both sides.

I dropped my comments and picked up my opportunity, while Maria relegated the smoking crater to its proper cavern.

“Miss Forsythe comes to see you often, I believe.”

“Yes. She’s very good. And she reads beautifully. I don’t get any time, hardly, for books. While I’m at work putting things onto people’s heads, she puts things into mine. She knows what to pick out, too. That’s a knack, just as much as it is with feathers and flowers. And my picking out goes better, always, alongside with hers. The prettiest hat I ever made was the one I did when she read us ‘Peter and Polly.’ Miss Meridon bought that.”

“You say ‘us.’ I thought you were alone.”

“Well, there’s Mrs. Lippitt upstairs. She’s a widow lady that’s taken my front room, over the street. She likes to come down here, for a little outdoors, and company, and somebody to tell *her* story to. It’s a good deal over-and-over, and the reading comes in as a relief. It’s funny, though, how her story joins right on again, when the reading stops a minute, just as if she had only been holding her breath with it and thinking it all the while, waiting for a chance. It don’t ever seem to be out of her mind, — her nice little house out at Linwood, and her own carriage, a pretty little slide-seat

buggy, and a lovely quiet horse that she could drive herself to take Mr. Lippitt to and from the train, and a cunning little window conservatory, and a garden, and pleasant neighbors, and tea parties, and whist clubs. She says it all off like the multiplication table, straight through and backwards and skipping about, and we all know it by heart as well as she does. But there! I don't blame her for living back to where she was proud and happy. We all like to have people know the things about us that we think to our credit, and very often they never would unless we told, — or remember unless we kept telling. She's finding herself now on two dollars a week, for the pay she gets from those shops don't often count up to much more than that. I don't charge her but a dollar for her room, and she's got nice things, and a little money yet, saved up when she sold out. When that has to go, I don't know which way she *will* turn, only there's most usually a hole for every mouse, somewhere. She's a slim little thing, and don't want much of a one. So I have her down here, and we have the readings, and they're a treat to her, and I don't mind her

multiplication table now I'm so used to it that I can do my own sums while she's reciting. She's ladylike and refined, and appreciates nice things. Miss Forsythe appreciates her, and is real nice to her. She gives her a cute hit now and then, though, that might do her good, and I guess is meant to. She set her a pretty little example the other day, though I did n't feel exactly comfortable myself to have her do it."

"How was that? Biddy's examples are apt to be effective." I felt that we were on the edge of precisely what I had come to find out about.

"This was — or enough to the point to be. We were busy here the other morning, and Miss Forsythe was in the middle of one of Miss Wilkins's stories, — the one where the man won't take gentian, and his wife puts it into everything she cooks for him, and it cures him, and he won't stay cured, nor forgive her, but goes off and keeps house horridly for himself, and finally that cures him of his stuffiness. Well, in the midst of the poor woman's tribulation, — though what she tribulated for I ain't saint enough to comprehend, — the shop-bell rang. I hated

to go, for I had every finger busy, and was holding on to an idea with the end of every one. It was a cap for Mrs. Fletcher, and she wanted it that afternoon. You don't know how many ideas have to go to the little fullings and flutings of a lace and ribbon cap that shan't be too big nor too little nor too young nor too old, but slope to the head just right, and be dressy enough and not flaunting. I'd got just the kick I wanted and could n't let go. I said so. 'Would n't you, just for once, Mrs. Lippitt?' I began. My! you ought to have seen her face. Why, if I had spoken out in meeting and asked the minister to come down out of the pulpit and pick me up my handkerchief out of the aisle—where I did drop it once over the pew door—it could n't have seemed more awful. 'You *must* excuse me, Miss Briggs,' she said, and the words were as stiff as teaspoonfuls of jelly just off the ice, 'if I draw the line at the shop. I'm sorry, but I try to keep myself as secluded as I can.' . . . I did n't listen to the rest of it, though she went on talking; but before she got so far or I could move, Miss Forsythe had dropped her book, and was in the shop, behind the

counter. And it was Miss Persis Pratt, of all the people!"

"I heard of it."

"Of course. Everybody will. And I'm sure Mrs. Forsythe won't like it. But it was just like her — Miss Bidy, I mean — clear through. Only I think hardly anybody sees clear through her."

"Did Mrs. Lippitt?"

"Not a bit. When Miss Forsythe came back, and I told her I was dreadfully obliged, but she should n't have done it, Mrs. Lippitt said, as calm as a clock, 'Yes, Miss Forsythe could do it. Everybody knew her, and it did n't make any difference.'"

"Did Bidy say anything to that?"

"Yes. She looked, well, as the crown princess of Prussia probably looked when the old German court lady laid down the law for her, and remarked in her politest little way, 'I should think the difference might have been in your favor, Mrs. Lippitt, *not* being acquainted.' And then she went on with her reading, taking it up in the very middle of a sentence, where she had left the old man in the middle of his muss and his wife peeking in at him through the window."

I had got the clue I wanted, as to what I should say to Biddy, and I got the chance to say it that very night at tea time, when the girl came in, "used up with duty, and wanting comfort and a cooky."

"And chocolate creams?" I asked her. "I brought some for you from the village."

"Put one on my nose." And she tilted up her pretty face till she held the nose horizontal. I laid the confection in the little curve between her eyebrows.

"I can't do it dog-fashion," she declared, holding it well poised, however, where it was. "It would toss over my head backward. It ought to be on the very tip, and the tip ought to run out further. May I use my paw?"

She threw her head forward, and caught the bonbon in her palm, whence she tossed it in the air and caught it in her mouth as it came down.

"Fine! Good girl! Now help yourself, and listen to me."

"My! Would n't Rex and Imp like that?" she cried, possessing herself of the bonbon box and turning one ear and eye up to me as she began munching.

"It's about your counter-jumping."

"I never jumped a counter in my life!"

"You jumped behind one, then, and measured off ribbon for Miss Persis Pratt."

"So I did, and I suppose she's measured off miles telling the story. Let her. I wonder which is best worth while."

"No, you don't. You know quite well, and so do I. But everybody won't. I know you don't care, and you did just right, then — for once. I mean it was right to do it that once. But you must think of Maria Briggs's interest in the long run. It would hurt her if people thought she encouraged or allowed it."

"Yes, I know," Biddy answered. "I didn't do it just for fun, though it was fun. You know I've made up my mind there is to be use in the fun, or else I'll let it alone. But the water will trickle over the dam if the sluice is shut too long. Mrs. Lippitt needed it this time. I did it for her good, more than to help Maria. She needs other doing good to, and I mean to see to it. She's working her eyes out of her head on stocks and stoles and frills and things, and doesn't get bread and butter

out of them. She won't tell much; she 'keeps secluded.' I believe she's under contract for that, as well as for not copying their patterns, or using them for anybody else. But I mean to find out. I know she does n't average a nickel an hour in her pay, and our scrub-woman gets a shilling. I mean to price her work in the shop, if I have to ransack all Trepeake and Royston streets to find the embroidery box it's in. And then — when I know — is n't there some long-tailed alphabetical society that deals with cruelty to poor finger-prickers? S. P. C. T. P. F. P.? If there is n't I'll make one."

"There are industrial unions and women's exchanges, and there's the consumers' league that takes hold at the other end. They are doing all they can."

"But they can't do all they can't. People go by fads, and they would rather pay ten dollars for a thing that came from Madame Genevieve's than give five to a poor woman who makes it. They want the mark on a thing. They don't know of themselves what is right. Does n't St. Paul say something like that? Women have n't any

conscience of the beautiful. They want to be prescribed to by some doctor of style. Besides, they won't take the trouble to judge for themselves, or to find out the Mrs. Lippitts the Madame Genevieves employ. And if the Mrs. Lippitts would go peddling round, which they won't, they would only get turned away from doors by standing orders. Some small things ought to be done in the small places for the small people. I wish I knew how to begin. If I could stay in one spot I might find out. I'd try right here. But belle-mère is wanting me for a duty trip to Europe. She is talking about sailing in September. I don't believe she would mind if" — Biddy broke off that sentence. "She would n't care so much if Grim could go," she added.

I put the two "if's" together with an "and" of my own, and made it out to be a case of the fox and the goose and the basket of corn. She did not care to leave a dangerous two together on this side.

But I still gave duty answer.

"Don't you think you ought to consider her wishes? Has n't she a right to expect that?"

“I guess there’s a right to expect on both sides. I’m not a child now, and anyway she isn’t my guardian. Uncle Geoff is, and he’s a bachelor and lives at the Kremlin, and does n’t know anything about girls. If I do as he says about money, and can make proper plans in other ways, I don’t see why I should not have that much independence. Uncle Geoff takes care of the business; I mean to take care of myself. I think that’s my part, and I think likely I’ve got the toughest end of the job, though they do say the money matters are in a snarl. I know very well what I should like to do, but I will not tell you yet. You might not approve, all at once. Perhaps you will when the time comes.”

I wondered why a queer kind of thrill came over me when she said that. Was I afraid for the girl? Or could n’t I spare her, unless a positive duty on her part demanded that I should?

XIV

MISS JOANNA! IT'S YOU!

I SUPPOSE Miss Biddy thought the time had come, though her time did not run at all with mine. At least it seemed so, on first comparison. But the trouble probably was that a hasty glance showed my watch-dial in a wrong position, and I read the hand-pointing wrong.

“It’s all settled, except my part!” she exclaimed, throwing down her hat as she came in. “Belle-mère is to sail from New York on the tenth of September, with the Worthleys. Meantime, she is to be with them at Irvington-on-the-Hudson. She wants to close her house and put herself into trunks for good and all. She says she can’t run bread and butter and maids and stable and place up to the last minute, and of course she can’t. Grim is off in a week or two to the Adirondacks with a college party. In the fall he expects an appointment in a Western hospital — an intern, they call

it — his place in it, I mean. So he's disposed of."

The last words were spoken in a tone as if they meant an intimate connection with all that went before or might come after. Bidly did not guess how well I understood; she let herself make her own allusions, for private satisfaction.

"And you?" I asked.

"Miss Joanna! It's *you!*"

I think I nearly fell off my chair. "How, possibly?" The two words, of interrogative exclamation, were all that I could find to utter or had breath for.

"Now don't go and have a shock. *Dear* Miss Joanna, I've been thinking of it, all round and round, for ever so long, and have n't dared to hint. Do be brave — and splendid — for us both! I want — to come to you!"

I sat stunned and silent.

"They'll let me do that, if you'll be so awfully good as to have me — just a little more — you have me so much as it is. They don't believe you will. They think I've tormented you out of your life already, and they don't see how I dare to imagine such

a thing. Otherwise, they'll let me go to Bar Harbor with Rose Summerchild — Rose Gayborn, you know, who was married last winter. I was her maid of honor. The Summerchilds have taken a cottage, and they want me. They are young millionaires, and it would be the time of my life, in that way. But you *know* it would n't be good for me, Miss Joanna. And I was just getting such different ideas organized in my brain. I've thought them all out, almost, and they mean work, and work right here, where I've found something to do. I don't tell them that, or what; I'm going into business on my own account. *Won't* you back me, Miss Joanna?"

When Bidy says "Miss Joanna," I am always reminded of Poor Pillicoddy. "Oh, that style of saying Thank you!" It is "thanks in advance," as the autograph-petitioners say. It would win over to almost anything that an old maid like me could do. But this was tremendous. This was having the whole Forsythe responsibility thrown upon my shoulders. Back her, indeed! I wondered what kind of a back she thought I had got.

"What about the dogs?"

I asked it to gain time, but I saw that it might bear interpretation as a considering of things. There was a beam in her eye as she looked quickly up at me from her apparent contemplation of the stitches in the ruffling I was hemming, the long strip of which, that hung from my knee where it was pinned, she had leaned over and picked up.

"Oh, they stay. Shawe is to live on in the cottage, down this side of the hill, you know, and look after the place and do odd jobs for the neighborhood. Rex and Imp are to have their house moved down behind his south wall, and all banked up for winter. Everything is settled but me. Shawe could do your furnace-work, and the dogs could be whistled over any time if you had a scare in the night. They're worth a dozen policemen."

She being here to do the whistling, of course. The beam of hope was broadening in her eye, as she worked so cleverly to cast the mote of objection out of mine. It needed checking a bit, before it grew too large for removal.

"There's a great deal to consider, both ways," I said. "It is very sudden, as the jokers say. You must give me time to think

it over. You have done your thinking; I must do mine. I can't give you the least positive encouragement now."

"You've given me lots negatively. You have n't refused. You can't help that being encouragement. Don't try to take it back, *dear Miss Joanna!*"

"I can't take back what I have n't meant to give, child," I answered, trying to be stern. "If you have taken anything, it must be your own lookout." But she was so used to me now that I might as well have tried to pelt that other biddy with one of her own feathers.

The beam stayed in her eye, and there was a smile all over her face as she wisely got up to go while she could leave things in the hesitant position which proverbially precedes an acquiescence.

"Belle-mère is coming to see you. Don't squelch her, please. Be non-committal at least, till I see you again. And remember that you don't want me to turn into a summer girl down at Bar Harbor."

With that she was off, leaving me in perhaps the greatest quandary of my life, not even excepting that other long-ago time and

its decision, which I made once for all in the negative.

I was getting absurdly absorbed in Bid-
dy's episodes. I had got where I could not
lay down the story of them until I had
finished it. Finished *reading*, of course. I
was as determined as ever to have no direct
hand in its construction, so far as plot was
concerned. That must construct itself. I
would try not even to imagine it.

Mrs. Forsythe came.

"That ridiculous child has got a fixed
notion in her head," she said, "that nothing
can persuade or compel out of it, short of
your absolute refusal. She declares she can-
not go away from you and the dogs, which
does n't sound respectful or complimentary
to you, but which means that you have got
into her heart. I'm sure I hardly know what
I wish about it; if I did, my wishes don't
count. It seems you can do pretty much
what you please with her; you're the first
person who ever could; and so it would be
a weight off my mind if you could possibly
be induced — Miss Gainsworth, is it crying
for the moon? Have you thought it over,
at all?"

I had thought of nothing else for three days and nights, — all the time, and that was more than usual, that I had been awake. I had asked Biddy not to come again until I had seen her mother. But now I had no disposition to discuss pros and cons with that lady. If I did the thing, it should be of my own judgment and free will, or what I call such. I did not care to consider points of convenience, or any personal favor either way with Mrs. Forsythe. The very fact that she presented the subject as she did, and was so evidently moved toward the plan by relief from her own perplexities and the escape it would be from such care as taking Biddy with her would involve, or from such comment as might arise if she left her floating around with a mere girl chaperon at a gay temporary resort, went further with me than anything else could have done to persuade my consent. Besides the question would come up again. After Bar Harbor, what next? And if ever I were to be asked again, or do it at all, I would rather it should be before Bar Harbor.

Underneath all argument, I can see now, was my wish for self-justification — longing

to be convinced that consent was what Mrs. Forsythe, in my place and with my feeling, would have called my duty. I could truly see that no other way seemed open for Bidly just then which it would be for anybody's real good that she should take. If she had felt herself practically alone with her stepmother in her life here, what would it be in Europe? How could they in any one thing make plans or carry them out together? It would be a handicap for Mrs. Forsythe and a dragging distaste if not a continual rebellion on the part of Bidly, whose errant proclivities were just in transition from purposeless whim to a strong earnest, and whose whole future might determine its character and course from decision at this turning-point.

So when Mrs. Forsythe proceeded with careful tact and scrupulous courtesy to the mention of details, I stopped her short.

"All that can settle itself; it is merely arrangement; we will leave it to a further talk," I said. "The real question now is of your daughter's happiness, and what will be truly best for her." I made no pretense of taking Mrs. Forsythe's own ease and comfort

into any chief account; I had no idea of offering my shoulders to bear her burdens. "And so," I continued, "I have decided that she had better stay with me. And it will be a pleasure to me to have her."

The suddenness of it "brought her up all standing." She did not know what to do with her reserve of argument and polite deprecation. She looked as if she had run against something she had not supposed was there. The recoil of my own instantaneous decisiveness gave myself also a kind of stun. I had not meant or expected it more than she. The resolve had come in a flash of perception of the absolute blank where should have been the stepdame's understanding of the young girl in her charge, and in the "caring" for and with her that had been so needed and missed. I simply grasped into my own hands what she seemed so incapable of holding safely, as I would have snatched a thing of beauty and value from the heedless fingers of a child. I did not exactly blame or despise the child. I only came to the imperative rescue. The unexpected had happened to me, rather than by me. I had settled the essential thing, and there was

nothing more to talk about. Practical commonplace and commonplace suavities were unendurable.

"She may come to me at any time," I said, with calm conclusiveness. The transaction was closed. I had taken the goods, and ordered the parcel home. I might examine my bargain and bring after-judgment to bear upon it at my leisure.

Mrs. Forsythe got her speech again presently, of course, and was effusive with confused acknowledgments. I was wonderfully good. It was more than she had expected — at once. She should never forget it. And Linda would be so happy! She rang the changes on her gratitude while she gathered up her sunshade and her fleecy summer shawl, and rose from her seat, holding out her smoothly gloved hand to me. She squeezed mine as warmly as the close fit of her number six permitted. No, she thanked me, she would not stop for a glass of wine and a cooky. She had an errand in town for which she must take the 11.30 train. She should see me again, of course, very soon. And — so deeply obliged — and *da capo* — and good-by.

It was done, beyond any decent recall.

And Martha Blunt was yet to be informed.

When I told her, she stared at me a minute, and then in a voice that seemed to come ventriloquially from somewhere in a hollow distance behind her, she said this only, —

“You ’ll have to get out of it. You ’d better have appendicitis and go to the hospital.”

“I ’m glad you don’t propose it for yourself, Martha. It means that you ’ll stay by. In that case, I ’m not a bit afraid.”

“Maybe I shall fetch up at Waverley,” Martha Blunt replied.

XV

SCRAPS AND HINTS

I DID not trouble myself a bit, as I had said, about Martha Blunt's disapproval. I was as sure of her in the end as Biddy was of Rex and Imp. I knew her little mind. She liked to growl, for practice, in case there ever might be something to growl about. When she had asserted her right to an opinion, she formed it at her leisure, concurrently with the accomplished fact, and took to herself the credit of a generous co-operation, if not of an initiation. I could not change the place of a piece of furniture without some perverse remonstrance showing in her word or manner; but she was never so pleasant or so helpful as when she had resigned herself to a plan or an improvement, and made discovery, as for herself, of its betterment or utility. It is everything, in these domestic matters, to understand your woman. If you know when and where to set your bread to rise, you

may let it alone, in the certainty that it only needs a given time to do the rest of the job itself. You have only to meet the working at exactly the proper point for a further handling.

If I had felt I knew just how to manage everything and everybody else in this matter as well as I was sure I could manage Martha, I should have been quite comfortable, and should have settled down to the anticipation of a nice winter, cosy in the companionship of my young guest, and enlivened just enough by her originalities. I should have gone on with my live novel in undisturbed content, as I would with any other entertaining book, being only a reader, and not accountable in any way for construction or outcome of the story; but certain other talks which I had with other persons made me feel as if it were something not quite safe, and settled between two covers, for me just to turn leaves and come to, but a work issuing in numbers, in which we were all more or less collaborators, whether we had undertaken it purposely or not. I felt involved in the action.

I have often queried, since it came to me to realize how much life interests me through other people's living, how all the busy younger world is, for a quiet, middle-aged, uneventful apartness like my own, as Shakespeare differently says, a stage and a performance for me and others like me to sit as audience to; whether it may not be that those in the plane of a farther-on existence are following with an intense appreciation and sympathy as audience or readers the stories and dramas we act out here; and whether this love of ours for imaginary histories may not have its root in a power and privilege of human nature to be fully developed only when that power and privilege shall be enlarged and so related as to be capable for help or hindrance to the shaping and directing of life ends, as we often fain would help or hinder the development of a fiction. It seems to me a kind of image of what it would be to overlook real lives and sympathize with the inner souls of them, knowing the hidden springs, the hopes and motives, the temptations and mistakes, and so learn the wide, angelic, unselfed love, and the noble, beautiful, ef-

fective impulses to use, which make the angels the "errand-riners" of the All-Loving Father. I think if this may be the training of all story, legend, invented history, it would at once account for and justify the universal existence and delight in such lore, and make the "novel," conscientiously conceived, a kind of holy writ.

Just now, the story I was watching seemed coming to me in detached bits, more like the scraps and hints of an author's notebook than like a consecutive, orderly narrative, with which I could proceed in the legitimate, regular way. They were in advance of the telling; had I any business with them?

I could not help seeing things, and guessing; but what should I do, or not do, about what I saw and guessed? Was I bound to keep strictly and honorably passive, being put in charge and trust, or might I, as in that other guessing game, "throw light" for others toward their clearer perception?

It seemed simple enough that I ought to keep from direct and purposed interposition; but what of the under influence I knew I had, at least in some degree, at command? How

about thought-transference, mind reading and prompting, inducing of new views, impressions, conclusions, which would prepare the way, on one side at least, for that clearer understanding? What, in short, about well-meant manipulation? I wondered if I could keep myself restrained from that.

It was a relief to know that Dr. Maclyn was, as Bidy had said, personally "disposed of;" that there could be no immediate practical complications in which I should have "to be or not to be" a *dea ex machina*. I had to rest upon this respite, and trust all else to the throwing of light to me when I should need it.

In this safe poise of suspense Dr. Maclyn surprised me one day with a visit, bringing me, unconsciously, more scraps and hints, and shaking my careful balance till I felt like Daffy on the bending birch tree.

It was natural enough that he should come, of course; only polite, as we were neighbors and he was so soon to go away from Overbrook; also natural and kind as regarded Bidy and the chaperonage I had undertaken. He said he came for both leave-taking and thanks; he was glad I would let "his

sister" come to me; my interest in her was a great satisfaction. It had been a trouble to him that his mother, with best intentions in the world, could not quite make it out with Belinda, or that Belinda would not let Mrs. Forsythe be to her all that their relationship demanded.

"They are not precisely suited to each other, somehow," he said. "My mother is a dear, gracious lady; she is always amiable, always *comme il faut*; but she is a little conventional, I know."

I should have said "worldly;" but I did not put it in. I let him call it what he would.

"And Belinda scorns convention," he went on. "My mother would make a lady of her like herself" —

"Heaven forbid!" I ejaculated inwardly, with such emphasis that it seemed as if he must have heard the words. He may have read them in my eyes, for he met my look with an unconscious remonstrance in his own, in the pause of a half breath, but he finished his sentence.

— "and would always consider her welfare. But Belinda needs something more. She rebels against social training, as such;

she does n't even care enough for the — customary; but she could be made into a noble woman. The trouble is she is far above the commonplace, and cannot adjust herself to it."

"Did you ever tell her so?"

"Not exactly. She does n't like personal remarks — from me. *I* don't get on with her, either, Miss Gainsworth. It's a pity."

It certainly grew queerer and queerer, everybody talking to me the personalities they would not talk to each other.

"You do not understand Bidly, Dr. Maclyn," I said. "She is a grand creature."

"Exactly — in possibility. I have just said so. But the grandest creatures — perhaps especially grand women, Miss Gainsworth," he put in with a truly masculine smile, "sometimes require the most taming."

"Petruccio!" I almost exclaimed, but did not. If all the unspoken interlocutions got utterance, what would happen to conversation generally?

"If people knew how to set about it," I replied, with propriety. "*She* knows. She

tames and rules those dogs of hers on the right principle. She understands them and believes in them, and they know it. They know" — I stopped. I could not finish the sentence with "she loves them." I went back to my first assertion, "You don't understand Biddy. And she thinks — nobody cares."

"*Nobody cares!*" The two words were italicized.

"You have great influence with her, Dr. Maclyn, — or might have. You are the only one who is strong enough, and from whom influence could most naturally come. But it works the wrong way."

"I know it does. Why?"

"She feels your contempt. That is all she thinks you feel for her, and it provokes her to provoke it. If she thought you believed in her — or cared" — My sentences kept ending in dashes.

Dr. Maclyn came in like a fugue every time.

"Not *care?*" he repeated. "Why, Miss Gainsworth, who *should* care? She is the only sister I ever had."

Then I laughed, and Grahame Maclyn

stared at me. I wonder if he thought me hysterical.

“I beg your pardon,” I said. “I could n’t help it, it was so very curious. That is precisely what she said about you.”

“That I” — he looked puzzled — “was the only” —

“Corresponding relation she ever had,” I filled out, and then allowed myself to fill out my laugh.

Dr. Maclyn did not laugh.

“And that I did not care!” He uttered the refrain slowly. “She is greatly mistaken, Miss Gainsworth. More mistaken than I can be about her. I should be glad if you could make her understand that.”

“I do not think that is my business,” I said, suddenly reminded. “I am afraid I am already meddling too much in — family affairs. But — really” — I changed my tone to a pleasantry, “I don’t think it is my fault. I think it is they that come meddling with me. I don’t know why. I’m not a bit of a Polly Pry, Dr. Maclyn.”

“You are a great deal of a diviner, and a setter-right. I suppose that is why. Anyway, I am glad Bidy is coming to you.”

Am I anything of what he said? Had I brought him round so far as to make him call her "Biddy"?

Oh, dear! I am like the old woman who "spoke in meetin'." "I've spoke! I've spoke again! Why, I'm talkin' all the time!"

XVI

RESEARCHING

I NEVER saw a happier creature than Biddy Forsythe was the morning she came over with her hand-bag and announced herself as "come for keeps."

Her trunks had been brought the day before. A few days before that, she had asked where I was going to put her. I told her to walk through the house and choose, only not to turn me or Martha Blunt out. There was not enough choice to bewilder her, and she was welcome anywhere.

She ran upstairs, and I heard her trip quickly from room to room, and up into the roof story. She was down in about four minutes.

"The little bay-end room, thank you, between yours and the big spare bedroom. Of course I don't want the state guest-chamber. I'm not a guest. I'm an inmate. And the further in I can get with you the better — for me. I did think of the south

attic, to put myself in a modest corner ; but that would be overhead of you, and I do jump out of bed hard, sometimes ; and I might be too practically underfoot of Martha Blunt, which I would n't be on any account. The bay room is perfectly lovely, with the side window at right angles with yours, and the bay looking out into the garden and orchard. I can speak to Rex and Imp when they come to the wall. They shan't intrude any further. And then those jolly, curtained places, each side the chimney, — one for trunks and one for hang-ups ! Why, it was just built for me ! It's perfectly great, inside and out. I'm so blissful, Miss Joanna !”

The next morning she told me she was going into town.

“ Don't be frightened, but I'm going to make a raid. It's the beginning of an evolution. That is a revolution, always, you know. Atom-whirls and planet-whirls, and then — germ-cells of everything. Do you know what a germ-cell is, Miss Joanna ?”

“ I have a distant idea. It's the beginning of something out of nothing, is n't it ?”

“ Well, I'm afraid that statement is n't ex-

actly scientific — or theological. But never mind. A germ-cell is a wonderful thing. It's an *Idea*, with the working-out wrapped up in it, like the oak in the acorn, or the world in the egg it was hatched out of, according to the very ancients. Professor Wormwell used to tell us all about it in his lectures at Dorrington, so it is all fresh in my mind. It's awfully interesting. You say you've a distant idea of it. Well, that's what it is. It's an Idea in the distance. I'm reminded of it because I've got one now in my brain. And it's bound to grow. It's got a nucleus and a centrosome, and dots and spots, that are the particulars of a plan, floating about in it in a kind of cobweb. It's all right and regular. Do you know what a centrosome is? I'm so proud I can recollect; it all illustrates so beautifully. It's something on the edge of the protoplasm, right over the nucleus, like a little wee star rising over the round, and there's where the work begins. It shoots out small rays — of intelligence — begins to get a glimpse of itself — and it spreads and reaches, and finally doubles, and there are two stars, — I don't know why, except crea-

tion always starts in pairs — and to see straight you must have two eyes, — and they both grow larger and stretch out, till presently the whole thing splits and there are two spheres and two centrosomes and two stars, and each begins the same multiplication table over again. It's like Dr. Hale's ten times one — all on the same principle, I suppose. And this is what is beginning to happen in my mind. I'll tell you more in the next lecture. In the mean time, I've got to float about and pick up nutriment for my germ. I'm going to float into Topthorpe — in an electric — with dear little innocent Mrs. Lippitt, and I expect to get hold of something."

"I believe you've got something you're afraid to come to," I remarked, looking at her searchingly.

Biddy laughed. "You're awfully astute," she said. "No, it is n't that — exactly. At least, it's only that I want to come to it by proper approaches. I want you to come to it along with me. That's the only way to bring a person to your own conclusion. And I tell you that as far as I've gone I've only found out that there's an Idea in

my head, and an Idea always includes possibilities and is bound to be developed."

Anybody else would have thought her rambling in her wits. I did not. I only gave up trying to keep pace with her in mine, and resigned myself to wait and hope for the best.

"Do be discreet," I entreated vaguely.

"As the discreet Kadiga herself," she answered.

"If I recollect my Irving, the discreet Kadiga made a mess of it."

"Depends. I think the story came out all right. Everybody got their own — except the poor youngest princess, and she flunked. I hope my princess won't. But then she is n't exactly young. She's only childlike, and easily frightened and imposed upon. She's old enough to know better. I shall try and work on her experienced side — after I've fixed things, perhaps, so that she can't help herself."

Late in the afternoon Biddy came home with a long story to tell.

"It's so good to belong here," she exclaimed, as she came out on the cool porch

in her white teagown. "And so delicious! Topthorpe is simply awful. It *isn't* Topthorpe. It's every other place under the sun. Hordes and hordes of people, even in this summer time, when they're supposed to have all got off the planet somewhere. But it was mostly in the cars, and at the crossings, to-day, for me. I got out of it — after I had done my errand — and up beyond the Park into the dear old hill region that's the only old Topthorpe left. I'll tell you whom I went with presently. It's all a part of the Idea that is working out. It was laid up from the beginning, like the spots in the cell. Don't you feel interested?"

"Very much. Only get out of protoplasm, please; and tell me what you have been about."

"Researching. Sherlock-Holmesing, to use another comparison. I wanted to know three things. First, how long it took her to do a piece of work; next, what she got for it — inferentially, from what she was apt to say about week's earnings; and third, where she carried the things. I would n't *spy* for that, though I might have tracked her. But I thought I had a right to reason

it out, and I certainly had a right to go shopping after embroideries. I'm making a long story about it, ain't I, Miss Joanna? Like a modern detective novel."

"Go on. The interest of a detective novel is the process. I am quite absorbed in yours."

"Well, I timed her. I watched her the whole of last week. It was all on one set of things, and she worked hard. I know she sat up nights, too, for I took careful notice of where she left off one day and began the next. And I found out from Maria Briggs that she only got two dollars pay that week. The screw she worked for took off twenty-five cents because she did n't bring the things back on Saturday morning, and a day's sale was lost. So after her ten cents trolley fare came out, there was a dollar and ninety cents left. Moreover, on the Monday when she went in, the next work was n't ready for her, and the shop was full and busy, and she was put off till to-day, and that means two more nickels to go and come, and a half-day's time lost. Talk about sweat-shops! What do you think of a shop that does its own sweating like that?"

The Consumers' League keeps a White List, but I suppose it can't set up a black one. That's where some individual work must come in. So I took this job up, you see."

"I suppose I shall see," I interpolated patiently.

"Of course you shall. I'm going right straight ahead."

She patted me on the arm coaxingly, as if she were pacifying a fidgety pony, and proceeded in her own way.

"Mrs. Lippitt, good little woman, is the soul of mistaken honor. She won't tell the least thing, direct; she's under bonds not to; but she lets out at the corners. I felt under bonds of honor myself, as I said, not to track her; but I thought I had a right to measure from the corners, and circumscribe my area of investigation. So I went into Tophthorpe with her to-day in the electric, and she got out on Royston Street by the Teachknowledgy Building. I knew they did n't keep embroideries there, and I knew she would n't have stopped off there if she was going down to Arctic Street or Tabernacle Place. It must be somewhere in this uptown region, where the modistes of

degree are getting in among the other professionals and artists, the dentists and doctors and photographers. She thought she was very crafty, standing still on the curbstone until the car had gone well ahead. I sat sidewise, looking forward and not back, biding my time to lend a hand. I kept on to Trepeake Street, and gave her half an hour or more to transact her business and get out of the way. Then I took a car and doubled back to the Teachknowledgy, and doubled again on foot down Roylston Street, scanning shop windows and lettered blinds. It's generally the fox that doubles, — or the hare, or something that's being hunted, — but I was on the scent all right, and I found my animal.

“Actually, it was ‘Reinard’ on the immaculate great window-pane, in beautiful letters as golden as the Golden Rule. — Are n't you tired, Miss Joanna?”

“You know better. But I'm anxious. It is getting critical. I am trembling for what you did next. Did you have a little hatchet in your pocket for that window-pane, *à la* Carrie Nation?”

“I had a little hatchet all right, but I

did n't use it on the window-pane. I went in and asked for sets of linen embroideries — stocks, stoles, and cuffs. Down came the boxes. I tossed over the things I did n't want.

“‘Something more elaborate?’ I asked sweetly. ‘Something a little odd and new?’

“‘Oh, yes; a beautiful set, just come in on Monday. Hand-work; made from our own exclusive patterns.’ And out came the little Lippitt’s week’s work.

“‘Price?’

“‘Twelve dollars. Very reasonable, you see.’

“I remarked that it was beautiful work, really. But I thought I had seen the pattern before.

“‘Oh, impossible. We have our own artists, and nothing is duplicated. This is the first of this style.’

“Two ladies, who had left a carriage at the door, had come up to the counter beside me, and were glancing with civil reserve at the things I held in my hand.

“‘The price does n't seem exactly reasonable to me,’ I went on, unnoticing. ‘There must be a *monstrous* profit on such articles.’

"I drawled the 'monstrous' out quite coolly, and looked Madame Reinard straight in the eyes. She regarded me with an elevated superiority touched with a holy wrath. She made a movement as if to take back her slighted uniques, but I held them gently fast, and she could not snatch. Her eyes snapped, but her remarks were politely satirical. 'Probably you do not understand,' she said. 'It is very fine work, though the style is simple. It is extremely *chic*—if you comprehend. It takes time,—and our own patterns. We vary constantly. But it does not signify. You said "elaborate;" perhaps you meant showy. We do not keep much that is showy. But I could show you something more pronounced and not so delicate, if you like.' And she reached her hand over the counter.

"I laid the things back into the box of my own accord, and then I stood up straight, and used my little hatchet.

"'I do not like, thank you,' I said. 'I have seen all I care to. I know that fine embroidery takes time. It represents a week's hard work. I know the lady who did it. I saw her every day while she was

about it. And I know what she received for it, — just two dollars. She did not tell me. She did not break her contract with you in any particular. I learned incidentally what her earning for the week had been. The profit is *monstrous*, as I said. Good-morning.'

"Then I turned round and walked out of the shop. The two ladies who had stood by followed me. If that plate glass was shattered, it was by an eyeshot from within.

"The two ladies stopped upon the sidewalk, and the elder of them spoke to me. She was quite elderly, but as beautiful as she could be, and when she smiled her face was like a star.

"I knew, as well as if I had been in both places, that behind that plate glass the Reinard was saying, 'There go two of my best customers, and Badness knows how many more after them. Why can't people keep their own side of the counter? Would n't I like to choke that girl!' Out of the corner of my eye I caught a streak of black lightning shot after me over the golden letters that said all that to me as plain as words. Well, never mind her any more.

“The other of the two ladies was in the glory of her age. I knew before I was told that they were mother and daughter. The daughter was in the glory of both their ages; I mean she had in her the crown and beauty of both their lives. Am I talking extravagance? I’m simply telling how those two made me feel; and I do sometimes get wild when I think what it is for a girl to grow up with a mother, and into all that a grand, beautiful mother is.”

Something caught in Biddy’s throat, and she stopped short. And it was then, when she did speak, that she said what I have told before of her saying, — “Things that I can’t speak of make me feel as if I should burst, sometimes.”

I just took hold of her hand and smoothed it with my own. She smiled. “I shan’t quite burst, now I have got you,” she said, and with those few words I felt repaid for all that I had undertaken.

“Now I’ll take up my parable again,” she resumed, with one of her sudden returns to her normal manner. “That beautiful old lady spoke to me. It was like what the old Highland woman told of the Queen, ‘She

noddit at me.' I don't think the sidewalk was under my feet, but some sort of a heavenly cloud raised me up. I've heard of walking on air; I just balanced on it.

"'I think you must let me know who you are, my dear,' she said. 'I am Mrs. Ulick North, and I wish you would come and see me.' While she spoke she put her fingers into a pocket of her little chate-laine bag and drew out a card. 'Will you?' she asked, putting it into my hand. 'And this is my daughter, Mrs. Oliver Henslee.'

"The card had on it 'Mrs. Ulysses North, 84 Mount Street.' Mrs. Henslee smiled and held her hand out.

"*Would I?* Would I go to heaven, do you think, if one of Jacob's angels came down the ladder and offered to lead me up? No, I did n't say that, unless my face said it. She did n't give me time, either.

"'Why, what should hinder your coming with us now? Could you?'

"I don't believe I even said thank you, in any proper way, but somehow I made out to let her know that my morning now could n't be good for anything else, and

then I was in the carriage with them both, and we were being driven along by the Park to Mount Street. Do you know I know girls that would give little bits off their fingers to be picked up that way by the Norths or the Henslees? But it was n't the picking up nor the visit to the house that inflated me and floated me up ; it was the being understood and taken *home*. I never had anything like that happen to me before."

"Did Mrs. North entirely sympathize with what you had done?"

"Sympathize? Yes. Approve? Not altogether. She admired a little, I think," Biddy added, with quaint candor. "Don't you think people admire sometimes what they can't quite encourage? I mean, they may think a thing fine in its way, exceptionally, when it would n't do as a style to keep on with? I suppose if Carrie Nation had only wrecked one wretched joint where some particular rascality was going on she might have been applauded, to a certain degree. Mrs. North gave me just that sort of modified applause,—for motive and spirit, you know,—but cautioned me not to

go round making rows. That was n't the way *she* said it; it's my translation into vernacular."

"Violence or anything like denunciation does n't help," I said.

"Nor hinder, which is what I want to do," Biddy answered. "But I'm going to try to circumvent or counteract. My *counter-act* is performed, once for all. That lovely Mrs. North is going to help me. The little cell in my brain made two or three multiplications while we talked at lunch. Mrs. Henslee was interested too. She has daughters just growing up, and she thinks my idea so good that she wants to apply it somehow in the 'Snips.' That's the girls' circle, you know, in Tophthorpe. It means, if you belong to it, that you are snips of the real old Tophthorpe stuff, and in for everything. It's no use for a girl to be 'out,' you see, if she is n't 'in.' Mrs. Henslee wants it to mean more and concern itself a little wider."

"But you have n't told me the least thing about your Idea, except that it is full of something incipient, 'as an egg is of meat.'"

“Yes ’m. So it is. And now I ’m coming to it. I want some of the other girls to take hold and get up a little class to learn embroidery — of Mrs. Lippitt. Fifty cents a lesson, once a week, half a dozen of us ; and the ‘six of one’ to bring ‘half a dozen of the other,’ — girls who could n’t pay, but whom it would pay to learn, — and so set up a club of workers for an independent business. Get the mothers and friends, like Mrs. North and Mrs. Henslee in Topthorpe, and Mrs. Meridon and Mrs. Brentway out here, to be patronesses and start custom, and make the little Forsythe Lane establishment a haunt of fashion, something discovered by the knowing ones, special and limited. I ’d bring the millinery in too, and set Maria Briggs on her own base, to assert her own genius and stop sinning against her artistic conscience. We ’ll all wear her hats to the first Snips’ lunch, — I will, anyway, — and set them wild inquiring where we got ’em. I ’ll devise the killingest thing that was ever seen on a girl’s head. I can draw the embroidery patterns, too. Did you know I could draw? We ’ll do all sorts of novelties. There ’s that Japanese

trimming, in soft colors, for bands and belts and shoulder strips and yokes ; I'm sure I can imitate that. Oh, we can make people's eyes water, and not with tears at the impossible prices, either, because all the price there is will come right into our own hands. Once started " —

"There's no stopping you, Biddy, in the imagining and setting forth," I said, laughing. "But won't the practical start be the uncertainty — out here in this little corner?"

"People like corners and monopolies — in stocks and things. Mrs. North believes in it. It isn't a new imagination to her ; it's experience and proof. They have carried out this very scheme down at Stillwick, where she and Mrs. Harry Henslee — Mr. Oliver Henslee's mother — lived awhile together when they were girls. Mrs. North's aunt was a village milliner, if you please, just like Maria Briggs, and they're not a bit ashamed of it ; and Mrs. Harry Henslee, before she was Mrs. Henslee, made bonnets with her, *à ravir*, and everybody raved and bought them. So afterwards she set up some nice girls there, and the business

grew, and she kept up her interest in them, and got a club together for work and fun and improvement, and called it the Cheery Comrades. I'm going to call mine the Happy Hummers, and have one of my cottages for the Hive. I guess Uncle Geoffrey can manage it, without putting it through the Court of Probate. That's Furzwego, as they call out at the end of the line — Furzwevegone, I mean. You'll have to wait for the rest. I'm going to see Mrs. Meridon and Constance to-morrow. I feel very strong, with the Norths and Henslees at my back, you see. People about here might have been shy of one of my freaks, if that were all, especially if I told them of the Carrie Nation part."

I crocheted quietly on in silence after her assertion that she had ended, though it did not quite appear to me as if she had done so. She gathered up some things that were on her lap, as if she meant to go away with them; then looked hesitatingly at me, and uttered a forced little "Oh!" as people do when they have something on their minds that they have been putting off saying, and would like to bring out as if just recollected.

“I did n't tell you, did I, that after I had told Mrs. North who I was, and where I lived, and who belle-mère was, she said, ‘Why, can you be a stepsister of Grahame Maclyn? I know his mother is Mrs. Grant Forsythe of Overbrook.’ Of course I owned up, and then it came out that Grim was in a class under Dr. North at the Medical School, and has worked a good deal with him in the laboratory. ‘My husband thinks very highly of him,’ Mrs. North said. ‘He comes here sometimes.’ Was n't it queer?”

She did not wait for my answer, but got up with her arms full of hat and wrap and parasol and a parcel or two, and went off with quite a flush in her cheeks and a kind of veiled glow in her eyes that she dropped the lids over as she went.

It seemed to me like a postscript, — the most significant thing mentioned casually at the end. But it could not signify much at present; that is, make much difference practically. Grahame Maclyn was to be away now in the Adirondacks, and then out West in hospital work. I wondered how far west he was going.

XVII

INNOCUOUS IGNORANCE

I ASKED Dr. Kinsman that question, a day or two later, having an accidental opportunity when he picked me up on the far side of the village and drove me home.

"I suppose it is quite settled about Dr. Maclyn?" I said. "Do you know where he is to be? 'Out West,' Mrs. Forsythe told me, and that is all Bidy seems to know."

"Out West is a big place," the doctor answered enigmatically. "But then everywhere is west of somewhere. There is n't much east from here, in this country. So I suppose it is settled, as for latitude. But I doubt if he is definitely pledged. He has the offer, but other things may turn up. He may stop a good way this side of the Alleghanies, or even of the Hudson River."

"But certainly Mrs. Forsythe thought he was going quite away — a very safe distance," I ventured. "I think she wished it."

"I think she did," the doctor replied sagaciously. There was a kind of chuckling reserve about him which excited my curiosity. "If she is satisfied, it is all right. Let her stay satisfied. It will make things more comfortable. And perhaps the very best happening that could happen may come about."

"Doctor," said I, "it won't do for you and me to put our heads together about anything. I've been trusted. I'm bothered enough already. I understand some little things each way, and I suppose I *could* close the circuit and let the word run. But it is n't my business to operate the line — nor obstruct it, either. I don't mean to do that. I don't think it is required of me. Only I don't dare to be trusted any more. If you know anything — or intend anything" —

"That you are aching to know, and would intend yourself if you could carry out your intention — Well, I won't trust you. Just go on in your innocuous ignorance. The best thing you can do for a while is to ignore."

I did ache to know what he meant. I

had half a mind to tell him that I did not feel safe to be left quite blind. I might, by omission or commission, do some harm in groping about among delicate complications. It seemed something as it does when my eyeglasses are lost: I am afraid of treading on them while I go back and forth looking them up.

“The good lady has not sailed yet. Let her depart in peace,” he said.

Then I knew that he thought something *would* turn up as soon as she was gone. I felt a frightened delight and a palpitating expectancy, but I quieted myself with nothing his own quiet, amused assurance. The next move was to be his, if a new move were to be made, and I saw that he had no uncomfortable doubt about the making. But if anxiety was relieved, curiosity remained.

When he had helped me down from his buggy at my little open entrance, he got in again, and I was at the top of the three steps in the wall before I remembered to turn round and say “Thank you.”

He laughed and waved his hand. “Go

on as you are till I see you again and advise further," he called back in his easiest professional tone.

A neighbor was passing by.

"It will be all over town that I am in some sort of a bad way, and that Dr. Kinsman has me in charge," I said to myself in vexation. But was n't it true? Lots of things are — in some different sense from the part understood — that get currently reported about us. I suppose there is some occult law of relation in the coincidence.

I asked Biddy what she was going to do next. I reminded her that Mrs. Lippitt still had work in hand for Madame Reinard, and that she would have to carry it back, and it might mean a bad quarter of an hour for her. She would be taken all by surprise.

"Of course I've thought of that," Biddy answered. "But I can't break the matter to her till I've something else to propose. So I'm going right off to-morrow to see Constance Meridon and Alix Brentway, and begin getting up the class; and about carrying the work back — I'll do that myself

if little Lippitt is afraid, or we 'll send it by express, with a polite note, and C. O. D. for the pay."

"And what if the class does n't materialize right away? Won't there be a tragical tumbling between two stools?"

"You wet blanket! No! I'll be the whole class myself first."

"Myself seems to be going to undertake a good deal."

"My plan is n't dead yet. There won't be any need of an undertaker. It's a righteous cause, Miss Joanna. But it is a game of patience. All righteous causes are. I've got to be careful how I begin to move the cards. There are my girls and Maria Briggs, — for we 'll have to depend on her for a while in the commencement, and I want her in the whole of it eventually; and there's Uncle Geoff, when it comes to the cottage question. Everything depends on everything else, and so everything has to be settled first, you see."

"That is a problem that confronts a good many projects," I remarked sagely.

"Political economy is full of 'em," Bidly rejoined as sapiently. "But matters work

themselves out— trusts and tariffs and labor questions and all— when the right people take hold with right and determined intentions. I'm going ahead ; I can't stop to worry."

And it turned out that she had no need. The right cards came on top. Possibly some quietly tactful hand may have taken a touch with the shuffling. It is not far from Mount Street to Birch Hill, and there are plenty of mails and telephones. And Mrs. Meridon and Mrs. Brentway had both been Topthorpe girls, and were still practically Topthorpe women, of the same set as the Henslees. The freemasonry of Topthorpe and its suburbanry on certain lines is wonderful. All "best people" are related to each other. Why, that is beautifully true, though I meant it only in a technical Topthorpean sense.

Mrs. North was not the woman to go point-blank to a social purpose. She would not make direct, crude representation or prompting ; but a casual reference to person or subject, quite safely away from their immediate conjunction, may affect the resultant when person and subject present

themselves in combination. I do not know the first thing about it, circumstantially, except from a few words that came round to me afterward; but I am convinced by those and my own intense inner consciousness that some gentle subtlety of hers prepared the way, and predisposed, as by an atmospheric influence, to an easy catching of Bidley Forsythe's idea when she should go about to communicate it. Neither would Mrs. North forestall Bidley's own work in any smallest particular; she would take no wind out of her sails; she would only secure for her a clear sea and a favoring breeze if she could.

Therefore it was all a surprise and novelty when Bidley told her story and unfolded her plan to the two girls at Brookside and Birch Hill; and she easily inspired them with her own indignations and enthusiasms; and those were not dampened by any misdoubting or demur on the part of the mothers, to whom of course the whole matter was referred.

"I think Mrs. Ulick North said something quite similar the other day, about local patronage of working-women and

tradespeople," said Mrs. Meridon to Constance. "Odd that Biddy Forsythe should have taken it up, but very nice of her, I'm sure."

"It's all Biddy's idea," Constance returned. "She went to Mrs. North with it. They've both taken it up, and they've taken up each other."

Alix's mother asked her if she knew that Lilian and Esther Henslee had invited Biddy Forsythe to their house-party at Stillwick. "Mrs. North said you would meet her there; she supposed you were friends already," Mrs. Brentway added. Alix repeated it to Biddy, inquiring if she had known the Henslees long.

"I don't know them at all yet," Biddy replied to her. "I haven't known any of them long. I have only met Mrs. Henslee at Mrs. North's. The whole thing was quite accidental."

It was very evident to Mrs. Brentway, when this was repeated to her, that there was nothing accidental in the present posture of affairs, and that the "friendship," which heretofore had been the merest neighborly acquaintance, might very safely

and advisably be acknowledged and advanced.

So careful are inquiries and so delicate are indorsements among the privileged, with whom the many are called but the few only chosen.

XVIII

ON STILTS

BIDDY was greatly pleased to be asked to Stillwick, where the old Henslee manor house had an ancient renown, as antiquity counts — and it counts fast — in this New England of less than three centuries. But there was the drawback of a waiting time for her new plans, and for poor little Mrs. Lippitt. This last had to be, however, Stillwick or not; for summer scatterings would not be over for six or eight weeks yet, and to be among some of the scatterers would help in Biddy's campaign, which she meant to carry forward at whatever possible opportunities. Meanwhile, she busied herself in getting orders for Mrs. Lippitt to fill on better terms than those of Madame Reinard. Seven or eight sets of embroideries were bespoken, at an average price of four and five dollars, which would be comparative opulence for the little lady, who began her work upon them with an alacrity proportioned to

the glad reaction of her spirits. She was all smiles and contentment; she began to chatter more of the future than of the past.

"It makes it all the pleasanter now," she said, "to have had a hard time beforehand. If you've never had the toothache, you don't know the blessedness of its going off."

Grahame Maclyn came out to see us before he went away with his camping party.

"Don't tell him a thing," Biddy commanded me, as we went downstairs to receive him. That was a rather general order, but there was no time to particularize. I left matters to her lead, therefore.

Evidently the doctor had not seen her new friends lately, except for his professional meetings with Dr. North, and probably those had been few. It was the off time of the year, even with the medicos. A general prescription of change of air had disposed of many of their patients, and they were able to snatch for themselves a few intervals of recreation. The Norths kept both of their houses open, and Mrs. North divided her time between them according to her husband's necessity and pleasure.

Dr. Maclyn showed in a happy mood that day — at first. Biddy was sweet and radiant, as was her prevailing temper and manifestation in this time of her congenial circumstances.

We talked awhile, naturally and easily, — the sort of talk which means nothing very particular in itself, but only that people are glad to see each other, and that anything will do for a medium to convey the fact.

“You look well, Belinda,” Grahame remarked, turning to her as the little thread of commonplace broke somewhere and there came a pause.

“I never was so happy in all my life, Pussy,” she rejoined.

I began to be afraid. The “Belinda” had touched the old wayward nerve.

“Do you find mischief enough to do to keep you pacified?” he asked, with not unpleasant fun.

“What do you always turn me over to Satan for?” she demanded quickly.

“I don’t think I do. You don’t need him. You’ve invention enough for yourself. What is she busy, or idle, about, Miss Gainsworth?”

How I wished I could tell! I did not like this dancing on the edge of craters. I only laughed, and said it was difficult to follow her, and then I began to question him about his coming trip.

He said he should be at the camp until about the time of his mother's sailing; then he should go down to New York to see her off.

"And then back here again before you go farther away?"

"I don't know. Things are uncertain. Dr. North may want me for a time. There's plenty to do, — almost anywhere."

Biddy flashed her eyes at him. There was something ambiguous in his words. "Uncertainty" might apply to either part of my inquiry. I noticed it myself. Surprise and eagerness were in Biddy's look as her glance met Grahame's. Then, conscious of her own expression, she covered it instantly with a bit of sauciness.

"Mischief? I've no doubt — and without any underground help, of course. I believe they say that help is apt to run the other way, sometimes, with doctors."

"Don't be flippant, Belinda, or common. Try at least to be original."

These two could not possibly meet without sparring. It began with banter, but beneath the banter was something real that got touched, and presently concerned itself in earnest.

"It has been my one endeavor ever since I had an origin," she replied defiantly.

"That has been the trouble, probably," returned Grahame coolly. "Originality is spontaneous, not forced and self-conscious. If you could have forgotten yourself you would have succeeded better."

"I thought your charge against me was that I was always forgetting myself. You are inconsistent, Dr. Maclyn."

"You are impracticable, Miss Forsythe."

They were both on stilts.

I was on pins to make a diversion. I be-thought myself of some ice-cream that had been put back in the freezer since dinner. I got up quietly and went off to ask Martha to get it out and bring it in. True, there was frigidity enough already, but one rubs with snow to counteract frostbite, and *similia similibus curantur*. I faintly hoped the principle might work.

Of course I did not hear what had come next.

As I reëntered the room Biddy was saying tempestuously, "Oh, Grahame! How unfair you are! I believe you *try* to think the worst of me!"

"Don't you try to make me?"

And then of course they both hushed up. So does a thunder-storm sometimes, after one sharp clap. Now that they had come to "words," sudden silence was the only refuge, and my appearance made opportune requirement.

I tried to be unobservantly conversational. I have not the least idea of what I said, but I know that Grahame answered me about something else. Biddy got up and left the room.

I called to her with a conspicuous nonchalance, "Martha is bringing some ice-cream. Just remind her of the cookies, please."

"Martha does n't need reminders. Reminders — and reiterations — are apt to be superfluous, and are always hateful!"

That was the after-clap. The cloud drifted off, to spend itself elsewhere. I knew

Biddy well enough to expect the sudden sunshine next. It was her way to follow her little tempests with an obliterating radiance.

Meanwhile Grahame and I sat and looked at each other.

The ice-cream came, and I filled a saucer with spoonful after spoonful.

"You'd better stop," Grahame said, and laughed.

"I guess everybody had better stop," I answered. "Why can't you and Biddy let each other alone?"

He had given me the chance, and I took it recklessly.

His face grew grave. "That's just what puzzles me," he said. "It seems we can't."

"Isn't it true, what I heard her say? Aren't you fortifying yourself against the best of her? I think you are afraid, Dr. Maclyn!"

What possessed me I do not know. It did not seem to me as if I said it, but as if it said itself. I kept my outside composure, but I trembled inwardly for what I had done, and for how he might receive it.

But Grahame's is a nobly frank nature, and he showed it now. He looked at me as if he were reading himself through my eyes. His expression was searching, intense, strained. Then it relaxed gently, very gradually, and presently he smiled.

"I think you see deep, Miss Joanna," he said. And then he turned that search look on me again, and asked, as if I were a kind of oracle, "Do you think — do you suppose it possible — that *she* is afraid?"

And now I knew. But what could I do with my knowledge? I did not have to answer him, for Bidy came back.

Just as if she had not gone away in a storm; in her most whimsical way, her own habitual, irrepressible self, that would not lower her flag before any attack or recognize any belligerency; as if there had been no "scrap" as she would have called it, anything at all to get over. Oh, no, they had not quarreled; not acutely, critically. There had been only the old chronic condition of things between them. Her acceptance of this as inevitable, unalterable, of no consequence, put matters in a more hopeless position than if there had been open

rupture, prolonged resentment. I think that was the way she punished Grahame.

She had in her hands two milliner's boxes, which she set down beside her, as she resumed her place in a low chair. Ostensibly she had only gone away to fetch them.

"I'm going to show you presently what the idle hands have done. I condescend to justify myself to you, so far. But what are you going to do with all that ice-cream? Do you think it will agree with you? Did you help yourself?"

"It was greatness thrust upon me. I could n't help myself."

"Perhaps I will help you. I'm very amiable. We won't have another tiff about 'help.'"

I was relieved by the ringing of these harmless changes. Yet Biddy's eyes looked as if the laughing shine in them had come after the burst of a few hurt, angry tears. And I thought they both behaved in a way that betokened something about that being "afraid" which was in question; as if they did not wish to be supposed to "care."

"Would you like to see a greatness thrust upon me? I've got some in this box."

She raised the lid of the larger, very deep one, as it stood upon the floor, and laid it aside. Within appeared something of a tall, coal-scoop shape, or perhaps more like a gardener's barrow, above which shot upward like a rocket a stiff, straight, cylindrical plume of white bristles, and beneath which curled, carefully placed and trained, a long, full, black ostrich feather, fluffing up, cloud-like, into all the side spaces of the box. Lifted out, a hat revealed itself, with stiff round crown sloping from the back against the rear of the scuttle brim, thus long behind, and short, upright, in front, banded with two stripes of carnation-colored satin, and in the bend at the left side a close mass of eight large red roses fastening the stem of the erect white brush.¹

Biddy put it on her head. The long black plume swept round and downward, almost clasping the dainty throat against which it rested.

Dr. Maclyn shouted.

"What's that for?" Biddy asked meekly,

¹ Lest this should be thought a willful exaggeration, it is fair to mention that it is an exact verbal representation of an illustrative figure in one of the popular fashion books of 1904.

her pretty, refined, innocent expression making ludicrous contrast with the superimposed, smothering finery.

“The touch of the infernal! Turn round, Biddy. Is the cloven foot on the other side?”

“Now you are really referring things fairly. It *is* infernal. For once, you and I are agreed. I'll show you the other, since you are so well behaved. The two illustrate, like advertising pictures of before and after using — Postum, for example. I've posted 'em, down at Maria Briggs's — with this result.”

“What does she mean, Miss Joanna?”

“Just what she says, so far. Further, the Sphinx must explain her own riddle. I'm not allowed to talk.”

Biddy nodded at me approvingly as she took off the first illustration and laid it down with gingerly care upon the sofa. “One must be circumspect with an infernal machine,” she said. “*Now* look!”

She drew a second hat from the smaller box, and walked with it to the pier glass.

“*That* was chaos. *This* is creation,” she remarked, as she put it on her head and

adjusted it to a graceful little tip over the russet waves of her hair. She turned round a bewitching face, with a look of challenging triumph.

The slightly dipped and upward curving again of the rationally shaped and measured brim, the peep of the low crown from behind its hollow, the single cluster of three or four small golden and bronze chrysanthemums that filled a little nest over the left ear outside, and was echoed within and opposite by a few buds and dark-green, crisp-cut, spraying leaves against soft folds of cream-tinted silk, — a twist of which was passed lightly around the crown and knotted upon the low, narrow bend at the back, — all made as lovely an effect as millinery possibly could, a real harmony in touch and color, precisely suited to the turn and color of the face and head it graced.

“Are n’t they?” she asked relevantly to her last assertion, but not clearly connected as to tense.

Dr. Maclyn did not criticise that.

“They are agnosticism and religion,” he answered.

“That’s transcendental, — like Emerson

and Margaret Fuller at the Elssler ballet, — only better and more apropos. Mine was good, too. The height of fashion is always chaotic, savage. Tamed down, kept or brought back to an original meaning, it is redeemed, educated. There ought to be churches and colleges to preach and teach the morals of clothes.”

“Biddy, you’re quite startling.”

Twice he had called her Biddy. Her eyes shone. But she rejoined, carelessly, “That’s my rôle, you know,” and came and sat down by me again, still keeping on the hat.

Dr. Maclyn did not retort, nor qualify his implied surprise of her discernment. I think they were never quite so near an understanding. It made me nervous, lest anything should touch with fresh disturbance the delicate adjustment, like a joggle at jackstraws, or a shake at a critical chemical experiment. I wished Dr. Maclyn would go while all was well; but I had to tell them they were forgetting their ice-cream, which was beginning to melt, although the little interlude had occupied but a few minutes.

Biddy scooped some of Grahame's into another saucer, and they ate each their share amicably.

And then the doctor did go. Biddy, in the irresistible hat, which seemed to have a charm rendering her for the time both in-offensive and immune, went with him down the dooryard walk to the outer steps.

"I'm going away too," I heard her say. "I'm going with a tony house-party to a swell country house."

"Don't be slangy, with that hat on. It's incongruous," Grahame said, but with a smile that seemed to recognize an unlikelihood rather than a liability.

They parted with a friendly hand-shake, and I drew a long breath.

"Don't I bring him round beautifully, when I take the trouble?" asked the naughty girl, coming back to me.

"Was it only a 'stunt,' you bad Biddy?"

"To make him growl, and then grin? No, you don't understand. He made *me* — moan a little — and I had to smooth him up for my own comfort. That's the abject truth."

She skipped upstairs, chirruping pertly

like a robin. I could not see a bit of humiliation about her.

Curious, for advantage and for disadvantage, was the relation between these two young persons. Brought up as children of one family, intimate with all each other's little ways, free to comment and criticise and snub, too near to get the fair and comprehensive mutual view in which petty peculiarities escape an undue notice, at the same time and by the same nearness cognizant of whatever might be admirable and good, their intercourse became a tangle of annoyances and offenses with hidden appreciations and deepening attachment that neither could resist, yet which made the differences sorer to endure. If a perfect understanding should ever arrive, their future would have a more beautiful certainty than is apt to come of an attraction more external, where a test and searching must follow which with these two had gone before.

But how would this be, and how much could other people, who as lookers-on read the situation, do in kindly interference?

One thing only was to be depended

upon, thus far, and I thought it meant, and perhaps safeguarded, a good deal. As I had said and Grahame acknowledged, they could not let each other alone.

I felt, as I had felt about this little afternoon visit, that a getting away with a last favorable turn of affairs and feeling was always in their case a thing to be desired and grateful for ; and that if circumstances should so determine, a somewhat prolonged separation at just this point in their history might be well for them.

But it is also well that, however wise our judgments, we cannot always determine circumstances.

XIX

UNCLE GEOFFREY IS A BRICK

THE Stillwick house-party was put off for a few weeks. Dr. North had work and engagements that would prevent him from taking holiday just then, and as he might join them later the ladies deferred their plan. Biddy was quite reconciled to having an interval in which she could fairly inaugurate her own proceedings. The embroidery lessons were begun, on the principle that work cut out and basted and all ready to pick up and go on with, is more likely to be gone on with than if left in the piece to be undertaken from the beginning. The girls had two or three meetings at Maria Briggs's, holding their sessions mostly in the garden, as the warm weather invited. These were voted great fun, and fine to look forward to for by and by.

One of the cottages was to be vacated before winter, a young couple who had occupied it going west to an Indiana town,

where an uncle of the young man had a carriage factory, in which he could give his nephew employment and a prospect of coming up into the business.

Biddy appealed to Mr. Forsythe to let her have the house.

“You can cut the rent out of my allowance, if you like. I’d rather have that than the two hundred dollars’ worth of frills,” she said.

Her uncle told her that she did not know much about the value of two hundred dollars, whereupon she retorted that he did not know much about frills. Then he laughed, and acknowledged that he supposed she was giving up something, and remarked that perhaps this would be as good a way as any for her to learn values. He said to me that it was an excellent thing for her to take up a real interest. “She has a forty-horse power of energy running to waste,” he declared. This was in a talk we had when he came out one afternoon to see Biddy, who had not returned from a luncheon and tennis at the Brentways’. In the half-hour while he waited he quite took me into his confidence. He is a strong, common-sensible

man; and although Biddy had said that he did not know anything about girls or frills, I formed the opinion of him that what he chose or had occasion to know about he was quite capable of finding out.

“The trouble with Biddy has been that she has had to devise life for herself. Nothing suited to her was ready for her to enter into. My sister-in-law is an amiable woman, but no more capable of understanding Biddy than of translating Sanscrit. She is devoted to elegant commonplace. They have never quarreled, but they have pulled apart. People have surmised ‘strained relations;’ the fact is, there were never any relations to strain. Now with Grahame it is different. There *are* relations there, Miss Gainsworth. They might be strong ones. They are strong enough for pulling apart to be a strain. Have you found that out?”

Here was another! Was it going to take as many of us to get these two within each other’s reach as it does to round up a ranch herd? I laughed at my own conceit.

Probably Mr. Forsythe thought it was at the palpability of the fact he questioned.

“I might have known you would,” he

said. "You seem to have understood Belinda from the beginning."

"What good does it do to understand?" I asked. "None of us can meddle."

"It's a good thing to understand enough *not* to meddle," said Mr. Geoffrey. "I am afraid Mrs. Forsythe in times past has hurt what might have been her own plans by trying to manage."

"I think her plans have changed," I said.

"Ah! Possibly. There *have* been complications which might affect them."

And then he went on confiding in me.

"I suppose you know that I am trustee in the Forsythe estate, and have control in certain matters beyond the two years' settling of immediate affairs and ready divisions?"

"I supposed the business to be all in your hands, however arranged," I answered.

"There has been some delay and some loss," he proceeded. "We have had reason to apprehend that there might be some serious diminution in values and amounts, chiefly concerning Biddy's inheritance."

The widow had a generous provision outright. That public steal was hard upon us. And there are mining shares out in Colorado that have been running down; but those are starting up again. Some old works have been cleared of water and are being operated, and there is rumor of a new rich lode. Shares have risen twenty per cent. already. If the thing goes on, the worth of the property will be more than doubled. Besides which, my brother owned the land through which a railroad is bound to run.

“I do not wish to tell Bidy of this, and I do not suppose she watches the stock market or even knows what her father’s investments were. I don’t believe Grahame does, either. I think he has been rather careful not to know. And I think they had all better remain ignorant for the present. Motives had better not be touched or imputed, or as putative made a hindrance. You see this?”

I did, very plainly. What I did not see was why I needed to be informed. Perhaps it was simply that I was so disinterestedly interested; also that I might feel safe about Bidy and her little money ventures, and

not discourage them through any conscience about economy; and even farther, that I might not be too scrupulous concerning Mrs. Forsythe's reliance upon me, and my discernment of her desires and interests. Anyhow, I was certainly in the middle of a story for whose good outcome I was more and more eagerly wishful and expectant; and a live story is very much more exciting and uncertain than one written out at the will of the story-teller to the measure of a salable volume. We have — the pity! — less confidence in the governing intent, and we cannot count pages and chapters, to reckon how long it may be before the happy turning out.

Mr. Geoffrey Forsythe surprised me still more by his next remarks. This middle-aged uncle, the bachelor who lived at the Kremlin and did not know anything about girls, nor by correlative inference about young men in relation to young girls, seemed to have made quite a study of these two particular young people of whom we were speaking and of their mutual attitude.

“I think Grahame has been persuading

himself of the objectionable in Bidy with all his might, and I think he has done so out of loyalty to his mother. The very points of fineness in Bidy's character — her possibilities — are so in contrast and antagonism to Mrs. Forsythe's, that their contact, or rather the repulsion between the two, as evident in all family affairs, has had the appearance on Bidy's part of something like contempt and superior self-assertion. This Maclyn could not tolerate. A man resents, even in himself, even in his natural masculine and world-educated advantage over his mother, a comparison that lowers her. Himself is born of her. He owes himself to her. Comparison, outgrowing, is beyond the question. His growth is her potentiality. At least I take it so," the noble gentleman said simply, coming down from the eloquence of his enthusiasm to a commoner speech.

"Grahame would not bring these two nearer together in such contrast; he would blame Bidy for her being and behavior; he would purposely strengthen himself against her by watchfulness for her faults and an exaggeration of them so hard and

wounding to her that on her part she would exaggerate them herself in continual demonstration, rather than let him think she cared enough for him to improve for the sake of his approval. And yet — so curious is the working of things in these relations — I think nothing attracts so tremendously as a determination not to be attracted.”

“Well, well, well!” I think I stared my ejaculations of amazement.

Mr. Forsythe smiled.

“I suppose you think I am very analytical upon a subject which apparently has never touched my own life,” he said.

That reminded me of my own theories of experience.

“Not exactly that,” I answered. “I was only surprised to find you had noticed so much. I have often thought that people find out a great deal in the lives of others which they have not practically known themselves, and for that very reason. What we understand already we are not so curious to investigate.”

At which we both laughed and dropped the special topic.

“Uncle Geoff is a perfect brick!” Biddy exclaimed to me when she had been down to the cottages with him and bidden him good-by at the train and come exulting back to me.

“I wish there was a yell that I could yell, like the boys going home after the League game. I’m to have *carte blanche* up to three hundred dollars for house and fit-up, and only a hundred a year off my allowance until I’ve paid up. And then if it does n’t slump, we think it can begin to pay its own way. Uncle Geoff just agreed with me about everything. It is n’t giving in, it’s seeing the sense of it. Is n’t he fine?”

“I certainly have received that impression of him. I congratulate you, Biddy.”

Biddy danced up and down on her toes. “You may,” she said, “all round, — uncle and everything. It’s just booming already. We three have got other three: Ida Simms, the carpenter’s daughter, and Maud Bemis, the florist’s, and little Patty Winch, the plumber’s — though what a plumber’s heir-ess wants with learning a trade I’m sure I wonder. But then reverses may come to the strongest of course, and is n’t it a stunt

enough to 'make the village grin,' Miss Joanna?"

"Don't be slangy any more — with all those fine feathers in your cap," I answered her.

"Don't be proverbial — or paraphrastic," she retorted, catching the reference quickly enough ; and that same lovely flush on her cheek and glow in her eye came up that I had seen before, and interpreted now as I had then.

I might have said, "Don't repeat yourself like that, if you don't want me to understand." But I refrained.

XX

IN THE NORTH STAR LIGHT

It was early September when the Stillwick party gathered at Henslee Place.

Garden, peach orchard, and woods, — all preserved and renewed with solicitous care, and so kept in their primal beauty and plenty, — and the stately old halls and chambers of the mansion itself were gay with young delight. Not less delightful than the gracious hospitalities of these were the morning or moonlight walks by the brookside path to the Charlock Cottage, where lovely Mrs. North received the young people to a simple lunch, or sat with them on the broad open veranda that she had added to the front of the old building, roofed only with the ancient, embowering elms, and thrown into continuity by widened and low-cut casemented windows with the parlors inside, one of which had been in old times the milliner's shop of dear Aunt Esther.

Here Mrs. North told them stories of her

early life, and the simple ways of living that she was used to before she ever went to Topthorpe, when Stillwick was just what its name implies, — a quiet nook, a bend aside from all rush of traffic and domineering of fashion; and she would say how good she thought it was that there had been such places for people to get ready in to live more largely. Her pleasant talk would often make the girls wish they had been born before such places and ways were obliterated; and the young men would affect a sigh and say, with a word that was a truth in jest, it was a pity for them that the places and the ways were all gone by, and that the nice girls who might have been in them, and worn gingham frocks, were all “out” in hundreds-of-dollars gowns at thousands-of-dollars balls and things, so that waltzes and suppers and conservatory flirtations were all that average fellows could expect to have of them.

“Don’t you hear us all saying that we should like this better?” somebody answered one night from out of a shadowy group of girls in a dark corner.

“Who said that? Who goes there?”

was quickly demanded from the other side. "Advance, and give the countersign!"

Then another girl's voice took it up.

"That's military," it said. "We're simply social. According to our rules, we don't advance, and we don't give the countersign until we get the sign."

"There was a great shout of fun at that, and nobody was found out, for we took care to disguise our voices," Biddy added at the end of the little note in which she told me this, as she did many such small incidents in frequent kind missives by which she shared her good time with me.

There was no need of the betraying "we" to enlighten me; I could have read between Biddy's lines without it; I could recognize her speeches by the wireless way, even so far as from Overbrook to Stillwick.

They had ten days of this happy, careless, objectless sort, and then the young Topthorpians went home, or scattered to wherever other summer plans and invitations took them, and Mrs. North asked Biddy to the cottage, whence she wrote me in the most beautiful enthusiasm that now she was not visiting nor frolicking, but *living*,

as she never should have known how to live if she had not gone to the North Star to learn.

“ Things are so clear here,” she wrote. “ You can see what to do, and you can do it ; for it is true here what is only an optimistic saying on a lower planet, that with the will there is always the way, right there and right off. It is because right things from a right will have been begun, and they can't help going on. Mrs. North says ‘ the living spirit is in the wheels,’ and she told me to read the first chapter of Ezekiel. When I come home I mean to ask Dr. Christieson to preach a sermon about the living creatures and the wheels, and the way they moved together and were lifted up together. There 's a lot in it.”

I was pleased to hear her say, even in the North Star light and gladness, “ When I come home,” and I was greatly amused by the proposed second suggestion she was saving up for Dr. Christieson. I fancied she would find him all ready about the wheels, as he was about the pigs ; and I did not doubt the whole parish would get the benefit as it had done before. If it were not for

Grahame Maclyn, I thought Bidly would do well to marry a minister — or, rather, that a minister would do right well if he could marry her. I remembered that Sir Walter Scott had a friend, one Joseph Train, who lived with him and purveyed for him in looking up localities and material for his romances. I don't see why a preacher would n't often be the better of such a colleague and collaborator. I dare say lots of them do have them. But then, I reflected, she can help Dr. Maclyn about the germs. Dr. Kinsman told her she might be the spoiling of a minister or a doctor. Why did n't it occur to him that she might be the *making* of either? I should n't wonder if it did; and I think also that the two professions are so close akin that a true, strong work in either helps inevitably in the other. Healing preaches, and preaching heals. It has been so since the beginning of the Christian centuries, and we did not need a new Christian Science to tell us of it.

The very next mail brought me two notes, — one from Bidly again, and more of a jubilate than ever; the other from Mrs. North

herself, with contents that were the jubilating cause.

She asked me to join them at Charlock Cottage for the remainder of Biddy's stay, which she hoped would be at least a week longer, if I would come; otherwise, she feared the strong Overbrook pull.

"I want the pull to be all one way for the present," she wrote; "and it is, if you are not stronger than both of us together, for we both want you eagerly."

I was not sure that it was two to one; Martha Blunt would have to be counted as a force. But if the yield signified, she would have to be one against three, and I guessed that would be beyond her.

It turned out that Martha Blunt yielded too; and my gentle, tentative pull against her supposed opposition nearly resulted in my own overset backward, I was so taken aback by her quick compliance.

"I guess Daffy and I can keep house for a week without you," she said; "and I guess you're more wanted out there while things are kind o' drawin' to a p'int that you're concerned with. And I shall get a rest before everything comes swarmin' back again to headquarters."

She did not know, nor I either, how full a swarm it was to be.

So the very next day found me at Stillwick in the late, lovely afternoon. We had tea on the veranda, and Dr. North was there, and he had brought with him Dr. Kinsman and Grahame Maclyn. It was Saturday, and they were all to remain over Sunday ; Dr. North and Grahame a few days longer, the former going to and from Topthorpe for needful duties. Somehow the medical convocation looked significant to me, as if there was something to consult about. But everybody was well, and if the village got itself into a needless ferment over the circumstance it would be its own wyte, as the Scotch say.

Dr. Kinsman had mischief in his eye as he shook my hand. I could see that he was as impatient to say something which for some reason he was painfully restraining as ever was Miss Persistent Prattle. I think men suffer more than women when they have a secret to keep. I carefully refrained from looking suspicious or curious.

The three were a good deal together during the next twenty-four hours. Something

evidently was up amongst them. It might be a new bacillus, or an antitoxin, or a chemical to sweeten swamps and turn malaria into gales of Araby the Blest, and bogs into health resorts.

Had Grahame, the youngest of them all, been the fortunate discoverer? For it was around him that the interest seemed to gather; he appeared to have something on his mind, and the older men looked questioningly upon him, as if awaiting from him some decision.

"It is worth thinking of, Maclyn," I heard Dr. North say to him, as they came strolling back from a smoke in the woods. "The other is the old beaten track, — long and uphill. This is long, too, but it is full of hope and motive all the way, and success in it means a world-wide recognition."

Then I knew it was some professional concern. I felt sure they were trying to do something with him that would involve a change in his plans. If they two were associated in it, would it keep him in the home neighborhood near them? Or would it send him further yet away, hunting up for them some great secret? I began to feel I could

not play indifference or unconsciousness much longer.

I waylaid Dr. Kinsman, overtaking him as he came down from his room to tea, and deposited his suit-case in the hall before joining the others on the veranda. He had decided to go home this evening by the Sunday train.

“How far west does it begin to be east?” I demanded of him. “Somewhere in North China, does n't it? And how far this side of North China may one stop and still have gone west?”

“From here? Well, to make it appreciable, just beyond the garden, say, and over the brook; or the same at home as I told you before. You need not work so hard to get at it, Miss Joanna. You're welcome to know now. Grahame Maclyn is n't to go further than that. He has decided to stay with me, join our research work, share my practice and save my time to that end, and make a name for himself. It's in him. Tell Miss Biddy we mean to find the holy germs. Perhaps she'll help.”

“I'm glad you've relieved your mind, Dr. Kinsman,” I said. “I could have waited,

but I'm sure you feel better. I only wanted to give you the chance. I don't think I shall tell Miss Biddy anything. You have got it up among yourselves. I'm not responsible."

"Don't take the credit of it by and by, then," he replied, and walked off laughing.

I hoped Grahame Maclyn would tell her himself. I said so to Mrs. North when she spoke to me about it, and I think she said a word to her husband; for Biddy seemed easy and ignorant when we four — Mrs. North, Grahame, Biddy, and I — settled ourselves in the veranda together on the Tuesday morning when Dr. North had gone to town for the day. We three women had our work, and Grahame the fresh "Outlook," from which he was to read aloud to us a political article. I do not think the child could have had precisely that appearance of unconcerned usualness if she had learned anything. She would have been too carefully usual if she had known. She had a lovely disengaged manner at this time, as if, safe in the happy restraint of common guesthood, she and Grahame were under a

I wonder I never thought of going into trade before."

"I wonder what you will think of next?" said Grahame, smiling. "But this is very pretty — and very — admirable."

"I suppose you mean while it lasts," said Biddy, a little nettled, or pretending to be. "I shall not think of anything next. I've found the occupation of my life. It's to be shop — first, last, and all the time. I hope you'll attend to your business as well — and as successfully."

Her words were a bit sharp, after the old habit, but she looked up in his face with a comically friendly impertinence. Now that she was in earnest about something, and felt herself on a safe base of resolute purpose, she could give or take a little jibe in all good nature.

"All right. Thank you," responded the young doctor. "Do you know where my work is to be?"

She had led up to it with a beautiful unconsciousness.

I turned a little in my chair and held my work further toward the light to examine a false stitch. But I heard everything,

though I need not be supposed to be attending.

“Out in the roaring West somewhere, I believe,” she answered with a cheerful coolness.

“Would you care if it were nearer home?”

I saw her give a little start, but she answered quickly, “Not if you would agree not to be troublesome. If you would keep to your affairs and let me keep to mine.”

She took “care” to stand for “object.” I think he meant, or wanted to mean, the opposite, or at least different, question. Would it be anything to her whether he were far or near? he would have liked to ask. I felt a little like shaking her.

“I am going to stay here and work with Dr. North and Dr. Kinsman. I am to help Dr. Kinsman at Overbrook.”

The color came up in her face. She hurried to speak, so as not to say the thing she meant. She would not say, “I am glad,” but that glow was traitorous.

Dr. Maclyn ought to have seen it, but he was looking off the other way. People are

so apt to look off just when they most need and wish to look at.

"Hunting up germs, I suppose," said the wicked little minx. "I hope he's after the good ones. I told him he ought to be. Perhaps you are going to divide with him. You've generally been cleverest at finding out the others."

"The bacillus of waywardness is what I would like to find," said Dr. Maclyn, a trifle chilly.

"Not far to seek, but hard to catch, is n't it?" was the ridiculous response.

"And apparently impossible to exterminate," he retorted, and got up from his chair as Mrs. North came out again and took hers.

"Wait a minute," Biddy coolly requested. "I meant to tell you I was glad."

"You made an odd beginning," said the doctor.

"I always do. But I come out even in the end — don't I, Miss Joanna?"

"In intention — yes," I answered. "I hope you will never keep on with an odd beginning until it can't be evened."

"Why, that's impossible. Every other

number must be even, of course, if you count straight on. And if you add or multiply — well, you must look out not to have *both* numbers odd, that's all. It's quite simple."

"What is it all about, please?" asked Mrs. North.

"About Grahame's staying at Overbrook, Mrs. North. He has just told me. I was so happy about it that I could n't say it all at once, and he did n't quite like that. I don't believe he is as glad as I am."

I knew she overdid it on purpose to cover up. I saw the real gladness in her eye and the flush still mounting in her cheek. I doubt if Grahame did. He only saw the mischief. But then he is just a man, and I am an old maid. I did wish I could tell him things. If they kept on I was afraid I should.

XXI

THE HIGHWAY HORROR

ONE day rushes over another, and obliterates for the time being many little things — postpones, at any rate, what might be continuous, so that no story goes right on in a simple following. A sequence is as hard to get in life as in *bézique*. You have to hold your cards of importance in a long waiting, while useless play is made, chances of other things are sacrificed, unexpected oppositions, hindrances, interventions, block the way, prolong the uncertainties.

Perhaps it is as well. The word is not spoken that might have been, the talk is broken off and never pieces on again with a perfect join, the conditions are changed; but disastrous as this may sometimes be, it is quite as often fortunate that things have to begin again in a new place.

A startling interruption came to our quiet intercourse at the cottage.

Grahame went to Tophthorpe on the

Wednesday, to return at night for another day or two. Mrs. North, Bidly, and I walked round to the Bend, where the little building stands which has been utilized for the Cheery Comrades. Bidly was making a delighted study of the arrangements there: the nice little salesroom on the lower floor, the workroom for the millinery behind, and upstairs a well-lighted chamber along the front with three windows, where the fine needlework of all sorts is done and kept on hand; back of this the parlor for social gatherings, and a little reading-room, with books to lend.

The salesroom opens directly from the street, at the head of a gentle green slope shaded by the wide growth of an ancient branching elm, the doorway facing across the Hollow, toward the railway and the bridge, where the road, sweeping down from Goldenrod Hill, crosses to meet the others at the turn; one approaching at the left from the High Quarries through a pleasant woods piece, and the other, the village street, running from this confluence past Charlock Cottage toward Henslee Place and the Corners.

In the angle at the Bend is the pretty Methodist Church, with its slender spire and its porched and pillared entrance.

The trains run through beyond, along the riverside, hidden, all but their white trails of steam, by the banks which the bridge spans over the rails, making a safe road-grade. It is at once busy and quiet here, a restful place to work in and a pretty one to come to, as the Tophorpe and Peaceport ladies have found it easy to do when once they have learned the way, and far less shattering to nerve and patience than shop-hunting in the city, in throng-haunted streets and the crush of department stores.

“Why don't they all break up and scatter round where there is plenty of room? It is as easy to travel out as to travel in, if you only once set your head that way, and the city might as well come out and breathe, as the country all swarm in and choke,” one lady said to another here, one day.

“But the great stores have everything, you know,” answered the other. “You can furnish a house, or fit up your wardrobe,

or get any of your thousand odds and ends, under one roof. Concentration makes convenience."

"I don't see how, when they have to roof over a whole square, and build up into the sky. And I don't think we need to do all those things in one day, unless once in a lifetime, in some abnormal hurry. I like to have my mind on one sort of thing at a time, and go and attend to it. I'd as lief take a bit of a trolley trip — especially if everybody else is n't aiming at the same spot — as go up and down staircases and elevators, and jostle back and forth through furlongs of counter-aisles, with floorwalkers sending one this way and that, and watching one like a detective all the while. Modern shopping is a humiliation and a martyrdom."

I am putting off what I have to come to. I cannot come to it yet without a shudder. It was a modern horror, that invades now our quietest places. The world is doing its best for its own spoiling and destruction.

We had been through the rooms and talked with the young workwomen and

with the forewoman. Mrs. North had a plan for a picnic to Goldenrod Hill next week. We must come over again to it, she said, for the day at least, and bring some of our Hummers with us. The two institutions must get into fellowship.

We had come down into the shop from the upper rooms. Mrs. North was talking with the forewoman. A young attendant was showing some baby wrappers and pretty simple little pinafores to a young woman. These things are kept in stock, neatly made, at modest prices. The young village mothers can afford to save time by buying them.

Outside, a little way down from the door, toward the meeting of the ways, under the shelter of the big elm, stood a baby carriage, a little face looking out from under the half-drawn hood, happy, fearless, with nothing to fear, apparently, any more than had the orioles chanting high up among the towering branches.

Biddy walked out to the carriage and began to talk and smile to the child. At first it smiled back, and made a little gurggle in return; and then one of the sud-

den changes that such small world-immigrants are liable to come over its mood, and it called out "ma-ma," and began to cry. Biddy came back to tell the mother, but the baby, relieved of its misgiving, hushed, and smiled again to itself. So Biddy did not interrupt the young woman at her purchase, but stood in the doorway, at the safe distance of perhaps a dozen yards, and kept watch lest any other fright should come upon it.

Any other fright!

What was that rushing and heavy rumble — that snort like a fierce breath of some enormous creature, — that sudden shout in the just now vacant and silent street, — "Look out!" — that frantic blowing of a horn coming close by, fast!

Down the opposite slope it flashed, a great vermilion-painted thing with ponderous wheels, a double car swaying, plunging, without control, thundering across the bridge, hurling itself madly this way, heading straight for the great elm!

Steering gear unmanageable — driver, with wild, pale face, staring forward, sounding his desperate signal, clinging with one

hand to the side of his machine as it leaped along, waiting the horrible event.

Nobody could say afterward just how near it might have been when Biddy realized its awful drift and menace, and started from the doorway. She went like an arrow on the wind, somebody said. They watched her from house doors and windows, panic-stricken; nobody was near enough to help or hinder; they saw her make two or three great springs over the last space as she neared the tree; saw her snatch the baby in her arms, drag it from behind its little safety-strap — its greatest peril now — and fly with it at a right angle from the path of the close-impending destruction.

Then they saw the monster come down upon the spot, strike the huge elm trunk, carom and overset. The little baby carriage vanished in the wreck; they found its fragments afterward all shattered and ground up, mixed with the disjoined parts of the broken machine.

The man was killed.

Biddy reached the shop; the mother seized the child from her arms, and Biddy fainted.

She fainted twice again that day, after we got her to the cottage. Mrs. North telephoned to the doctor; he hurried to us by the next train. The same train brought press reporters. Mrs. North, downstairs, was answering their questions with such circumspection as she might, while Dr. North and I were administering remedies to Bidy in her room above.

“Don’t tell anybody,” she was saying dreamily, in a half-sensible interval.

Not tell anybody, when it would be in all the evening and morning papers! Only a small paragraph or two, to be sure, a mere incidental, mentioned and forgotten. But it was an item, and it would go in—one of the every-day happenings that fill up the columns of the dailies, and help to multiply their unmanageable sheets.

How she would hate it! Could we keep it from her, and what would be the use when everybody would talk to her, would write and telephone and inquire, sympathize, admire, congratulate! No reticence of Mrs. North’s would keep anything back; the whole neighborhood knew, and was full of it; particulars could be had at every

corner. And the day was past when Biddy had pleased herself in making the village grin — or gasp.

“I don't want to be talked about,” she said, now that she had done something real. “I'm tired of it. And they'll say more than was true. They'll have it that I grabbed the thing, and stopped it with my two hands.” She laughed at her own absurdity. She was hysterical.

“But oh! that little, little baby!” And then she sobbed.

I quieted her with the camphor mixture and the bathing, and then I only said, “You can't help its being known, dear, but don't let it trouble you. Be glad that it was given you to do, and forget the rest. Other people will forget fast enough.”

She cried quietly after that, but the tears did her good. I sat by her until she grew composed and fell asleep.

By the evening she was up, and joined us at our tea. I thought she made a great effort to do so, to avoid what she called a “fuss” when Grahame should arrive. But Grahame did not come that night; he had gone away somewhere to a patient with Dr. Kinsman,

and had not even seen the "Evening Transcriber."

The next morning brought him. I met him at the door. He was pale and eager-eyed.

"How is she?" His voice shook.

"She has slept well," I answered. "She is all right now, Dr. North says. Only she must not be excited. It was a great shock and strain."

"I found it in the 'Hearsay' this morning on my way in from Overbrook. Yes," he caught his breath between his teeth, "it was a horrible shock. I could not make out whether she was hurt. The paper said, 'The young lady is a guest of Mrs. Ulick North. She is lying ill from the effects of the accident at the North Cottage.'"

He dropped into a chair as he spoke. I went and got him a glass of wine. Evidently he had held out as long as he could under the strain.

"Take care what you say to her," I told him when he asked where she was and if he might see her. "We have kept her upstairs, out of the way of people and comments. Don't tell her it is in the papers."

He meant to be careful. He began with an ordinary inquiry — as ordinary as he could make it. But he put out both his hands, and held both hers while he said, “Well, Biddy, how are you — after it all?”

“I’m all right, thank you,” said Biddy, getting her hands away, and looking up with a “why should n’t I be?” sort of air, as if nothing had happened to be inquired about.

Then he could not help it. He burst out, —

“All right! I should think so! Biddy, you’re grand!”

“I’m no such thing. I don’t want to be grand.”

“What you did was grand, then.”

“I did n’t do a thing. I was just taken hold of, and done with. Why, there was n’t anybody else right there. If there had been, they would have done it — anybody would.” She repeated her anybodies as if they made her nobody. “Don’t talk about it,” she said half wearily.

“Better not. But all the same it was you, — and you were grand!” he persisted.

"You never did know much about me, Grim."

He made no reply. Very likely he was beginning to think so himself, which was why he was so determined to have his own word now.

"I don't care to be called grand. I'm just what happens," she said. And when he still did not speak, she went on a little relentingly, —

"I would a great deal rather be only — nice."

"You grow nicer every day," he answered then, in a grave, kind voice.

"I don't care to be patted and purred over, either, Grimalkin," the wayward thing replied.

I think he was coming too near to meeting her secret longing for her to allow herself yet to appropriate his word. Besides, to be only "growing" nice!

"Can't you ever forget the claws?" Grim asked her.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I've been used to them so long. But for all your clawing — I suppose it has been researching; it has been a good deal like

vivisection, sometimes," and she laughed — "you have never got at the real me of me." There was no laugh in her voice at the end of her sentence.

"The Me lies pretty deep with all of us," said Grahame gently. "And you have covered yours up very persistently. But I am finding you out."

"I hope it will turn out to have been worth your while, — if we both live long enough," Biddy said gayly. "And there comes Dr. North to see that you don't finish me up now."

When I had told Martha Blunt all about it very particularly, — the automobile story, I mean, — I asked her with some quiet triumph what she thought now of Biddy Forsythe.

"She's got grit," was Martha's answer. "She's turning out pretty well."

"Don't you think we ought always to wait and see how people turn out before making up our opinions?" I pursued. "We all have our developing to do, even after we get to be much older than Miss Biddy."

“Yes ’m, I know,” returned the woman who never surrendered at the first gun or unconditionally. “But you can’t help judging a little, gradual, as you go along. Folks are pretty uncertain. Some of ’em develop, and some only devil-up. And now and then they take turns about it.”

“Then we must take turns too,” I answered. I thought I had the last word.

But she sent one after me as I left the kitchen.

“Not too many of ’em, nor too rapid. We should get all twisted up. I guess we’d better leave it pretty much to the Lord, after all. He does n’t twist nor turn, the Bible says.”

XXII

DAUGHTERING

“Won't she be hoppin'?”

“Who?”

“You know. Mrs. Forsythe.”

“I don't think so, Martha. She can't.”

“Can't what?”

“Hop,” I answered, and then felt ashamed of the hard-hearted joking. “I mean, she must stay where she is, for the present. Her sister is ill, you know.”

“I don't know anything about her. I don't think you do. People are sick or well accordin' to her conscience, mostly. She always gets her duty on her side, I notice. And I did n't say hoppin' over, or back, or off. She can hop up and down, wherever she is, can't she? I guess you understood.”

“Perhaps I did. But we don't want to think anything unkind about her, Martha. If this troubles her, and she is out there away from it all, it is a pity for her, how-

ever we feel about it. I did n't like to take your word just as it sounded."

"And so you twisted it, and made it worse," said this very plain-spoken woman. "I was n't ridiculin'. She 'll be mad, and I can say so, and then turn round and pity her, if I think I ought to. That 's the order human nature works in, mostly, — chuckle first, and charity afterwards. If you tried to make it go the other way, you 'd lose your chuckle."

We were talking of Dr. Maclyn and the new plans.

People generally talked. Miss Persistent Prattle made six calls in one afternoon, to sense the neighborhood.

"Well, I don't know," she began, as she always did when she felt full of information and opinions formed thereon. "Folks talk about people rising up out of their graves at things. If she does n't rise up out of wherever she 's rooted when she hears of this, and come haunting back again, it 'll be because she can't yank him over there to her. She 'll be sick or something, see if she is n't. Look out for telegrams about these days. Dr. Kinsman, indeed! Poking into

protoplasm ! What he don't poke into is n't pokable. I hope he won't stir up more than he can settle."

I think we all hoped that. Meantime the two persons most concerned were apparently the least so, as to any feeling of strangeness or significance in what had come about. They took it as naturally as possible that they should be in Overbrook together, where they both belonged. It was the most likely drift of things.

Dr. Maclyn came in to see us as a matter of course. Their brother and sister footing rendered remark on that score impossible. If he had stayed away, it would have meant more, — strained relations, or what not. I think each was very wise and well advised as regarded the other. Their intercourse was easy, unconscious of reason why not. Grahame made no show of special approvals, as if watching any process of "growing nicer," while he certainly made none of his old strictures. Biddy did not appear to miss them, neither did she evidence any care to avoid provoking them; she was playful, piquant, even a little saucy now and then; she toned down from no-

thing of her natural spirit ; that was not her idea of niceness. She would be accepted as she was ; but she had lost her old attitude of perverse antagonism, as he his of carping criticism. I was half afraid they would be on too well established terms of ordinary association ; that no little jar or shake would throw them into a sudden mutual understanding of all that lay behind concessions and tolerations. Would they simply find out, by very gradual adaptation and more and more of sympathetic dependence, that they could never do without each other again, and so drift, without much demonstration or intensity of experience, into what was more deeply vital with them both than they would have any vivid joy of realizing ? And how long would it take ? And how much time would Mrs. Forsythe give them ?

Not much quiet time, it became evident. Her letters were frequent and worrying. She was with her sister at Hastings, where Mrs. Redwood had been settled for a year past. It was thought the best climate for her, but she grew no better. They might have to stay there a long while. It did

not agree with Mrs. Forsythe very well. The sea never did. Her eyes troubled her. It was hard for her to be alone with such a care, and she knew not for how long. Oh yes, she had replied to early anxious inquiries, people were kind; they had comforts, an excellent physician, and a good trained nurse. But now the tone of loneliness prevailed. After all, she needed some reliance and sustaining that she could not have among strangers; everything really rested upon herself, — and so on. Once she even said that she “wished Biddy could have been there to read to them; but she supposed she could not have been spared from Maria Briggs.” This was cruel, but she could not have known how much so; Biddy was different now, and it stung her conscience.

Evidently the dullness was wearing upon a temperament that craved social stimulus and variety. It was not the ideal winter abroad that the lady had anticipated. The illness which had furnished the “duty” part of the argument for it was proving very real and threatening, and Mrs. Forsythe was timid about illness. A gentle invalidism

was all that she had expected or knew much about. Her two husbands had died, it is true; but with one it was by a sudden stroke, and with the other a close almost as without immediate warning to a prolonged failing of health which she had realized less as a positive declension than as a negative, uncomfortable condition. Her own daily life had not been much fettered or disturbed by it.

Dr. Maclyn began to think that if things grew at all worse he might have to break away from his work here and go out to his mother. He begged her to cable at once if she wanted him. I could not help feeling that these letters were nicely adapted to just this effect. I hope I was not unfeeling or uncharitable.

Mr. Geoffrey Forsythe, at any rate, shared my impression.

"We must leave a margin for Louisa's moods," he said. "Her representations are colored by them always. She can't help it any more than a prism can help refracting."

If he had said "motives" instead of "moods," he would have been more precise.

"I think Grahame had better wait some

absolute and obvious call, and I shall tell him so," Uncle Geoffrey added.

Biddy did not leave the margin in her interpretations of her stepmother's statements which she had formerly been apt to do. She was growing "nicer" in her judgments, kinder in her conclusions. Besides, she was turning her back upon the whole subject, which was open to us others and furnished us with data for our inferences. I think, moreover, that she was becoming so truly in sympathy with Grahame that she ranged herself on his side and took his point of view. She knew that he was troubled, and she was ready to feel that he had reason.

"I've been thinking a good deal about belle-mère lately," she said to me. "She can't be having a very good time out there. And if Mrs. Redwood should die — Miss Joanna, I have n't had just the sort of mothering I wanted, but perhaps she has wanted the daughtering just as much. If she had been my real mother, I should have been sure of the realness, and should not have been measuring and comparing it. I should have been right in her heart, and

have known it; so I should not have minded the little things we were different in. Do you think there is anything *my* mother would want me to do for belle-mère, because she stands instead of herself to me? And my father? — because she was his wife too.”

“Biddy, you have touched the real secret of it all. The stepmother takes the mother’s place — steps into it. The daughter must step too. She must recognize that the place is taken, the relation represented. She must accept her own place and represent daughterhood. It must work both ways, or instead of a step it’s a stumble.”

“But we — the daughters — have not *chosen* the place. We have n’t assumed the duties. They are put upon us.”

“Yes. They are chosen for us — given to us. I say ‘we’ and ‘us.’ I was a step-daughter too, and I can see where I might have helped more in the relation.”

“I don’t believe you ever hindered.”

“There was not any long or serious hindrance. We grew together at last. But there was a time when I rebelled — in my heart — and so could not possibly have

been all that I ought to have been in the outside showing."

"I haven't cared enough to rebel. I have just let things alone as much as I could. And now—I don't want to make a fuss about repenting and reforming, but I would like to be as nice as I can, in a natural way, and see what comes of it."

I felt quite sure what that meant, whether she understood it clearly in herself or not. She was as reluctant to appear to be lovely all at once to Grahame's mother, and "see what would come of it" in that direction, as he was to add to any present complications, or yield an unreserved regard where there was still this reserve of the full and kindly appreciation which might end them.

Things went on as they had begun with the work and interests on either side. The Hive was buzzing merrily. Mrs. Lippitt was as happy as things—her things, cosily gathered around her—and a feeling of bread and butter security could make her. The comb was filling up with honey; they had a fine stock already laid in for Christmas sales; their cards were out, advertising their pretty specialties, and bearing the names of

Topthorpe and Overbrook patronesses ; the Overbrook girls had worn the most distracting hats at a Snips' lunch, and the debutantes of the season were sending orders. Bidly's letters to England were full of her enterprise and its successes.

They had a Christmas tree, and a Twelfth-Night frolic, when Mrs. Lippitt got the coin, and Bidly herself the ring out of the big cake. And there was a theatre party to see Maude Adams in "The Little Minister," and a sleigh-ride down to Quimby's Neck, to see the winter surf and eat hot oysters. And then came Lent, and they settled down to busy work and delightful readings, with quiet evening games of logomachy and backgammon, halma, checkers, and learning chess. And Dr. Christieson gave them a lovely Lenten talk each week. There was no doubt whatever that the Hive of Happy Hummers was an established institution.

Grahame had his rooms at Dr. Kinsman's, and was fast making his way into favor as his associate. He wrote his mother eagerly of his plans and hopes. There was not a word, I am sure, in the correspondence

with her of either of the young people to excite her immediate apprehension. They were absorbed with different affairs.

I wrote to Mrs. Forsythe now and then, replies to letters from her in which I could often read between the lines what did not call for direct answer that I certainly did not make. I did not feel it incumbent on me to go deeper than the surface of things in my communications. It would have been a liberty to take. I might surmise, or even desire, but it was at my own risk only. I was a looker-on. It was their play, and just now the act-drop seemed to be down. Nothing particular was happening. Nobody seemed to mean to let anything happen.

Nothing ever did happen, except when I got into some talk like these I am reporting, which had their significance for me in my own interpretations, but which I was under no obligation to report between party and party. *Tout au contraire.*

For example, Grahame came in one afternoon while Biddy was at the Hive.

It was a shining winter day. White snow banks, long snow wreaths, wide stretches of snow level, lay everywhere. The path

around into the lane was walled and sheltered by the soft heaps. Everybody had the exhilarant winter tone. Biddy had gone off right after dinner, for a good long reading with her girls. Grahame had been in town, at a clinic by Dr. North.

"I knew she was n't here," he said, when I told him where Biddy had gone.

"Rex and Imp were disporting themselves outside in the lane, making the snow fly in clouds with their plunges. She is pretty nearly always down there, is n't she?"

"She is very busy — and very happy," I said.

"She lives in her activities," he returned. There was a tone — I was growing sharp in my detections — in the way he said it, which moved my answer.

"She takes refuge in her activities."

"From what?"

There! I was in for it again, and I was just as innocent!

I did not say anything in reply at first, for I was afraid of saying too much. But he repeated his question.

"From what?"

And then I told my true thought, as I always do.

"From the want that would be in her life otherwise. That is the spring of outside activities with a great many women."

"Why? What is the want?"

"The want of a complete personal satisfaction."

"In what?"

How he pinned me down. I felt in a witness box.

"In personal relations. If Bidy Forsythe should ever have an absorbing personal affection" —

I thought I was keeping quite clear of mischief; indeed, risking a contrary mischief in avoiding one. So I stopped; but he would have all that I could be made to say.

"Do you think she ever will have?"

"I think so, because she is so capable of it. I think she might even grow into one without knowing it — for a time. She would not let herself know it, unless its counterpart — something great and worthy and generous — came to her and asked for it. Then it would be the awakening of the

princess. And she *is* a princess, Dr. Grahame Maclyn!"

He looked at me very intently. I do not know that he even noticed my little defiant outburst of championship. I think he was wholly occupied with his own question and what he could get from me in reply to that.

"I suppose women understand women," he said. The gravity of his face relaxed into a smile.

"Do you think such an affection would be sufficient to her in itself? Would n't she demand a great deal in its surroundings? I mean, not in material affairs, but in congenial associations. She is not very tolerant of anything that does not reach — and express — her ideal."

And then I felt he was thinking of his mother, and of Biddy's not having been tolerant of her. This was the great block between them, and I knew it.

"Love is a plant that roots itself on every side," I answered him. "It takes in its surroundings. As for Biddy, the sympathetic side of her nature is developing fast. She begins to find out that it might have answered, ought to have answered, per-

haps, more fully to what has surrounded her already. She thinks, for instance, she might have done her daughtering better, instead of waiting for a mothering precisely such as she could fancy. She has been feeling disturbed lately about Mrs. Forsythe."

"Did she say that?" asked Grahame quickly.

"What?"

"About the mothering and the daughtering. I wish I could have known she was capable of that. I should have been different with her always. I am afraid I have made great mistakes."

I kept silence. That answered him. He sat still a moment or two, and then got up to go.

"I thank you, Miss Joanna. We all have many reasons to thank you. I hope we may find we have still more."

He pressed my hand warmly, and went away.

Had I been "telling things"? I had only answered him. And it surely had been right to help the right understanding of all these people with each other. If it concerned a particular two of the three-sided

interdependency more vitally than either other, could I help that? And if people will talk through me — both ways — well, a telephone wire is only a passive agent.

Things were not happening much, as I have said; it was only the inside story that was working. Plainly, inside was where the story had got to work. And it would take a little time. Incidents might occur to help. Still, not only a good deal had to be changed, — that was doing rapidly, — but to put all on the footing of the new conditions, to undo what years had brought about in mutual apprehension, so that each should apprehend and recognize afresh, involved what Grahame, at any rate, realized for himself; and I could not but see that a waiting and a careful retracing and unraveling of old threads and tangles were inevitable before any happy winding up of affairs could be reached or hoped for. And so the winter had to go on.

I think Bidy settled into a happy content. Grahame was kind; he was thinking better and better of her every day. Not that he needed, on his part, much more confirmation or bettering of opinion, — I was

pretty sure of that, — but how was Bidy to be roused to full understanding of the change in him? How long would she stop in this mere content?

Now that he cared for her, cordially, amiably, it seemed to be enough; she rested in that; she apparently forgot to be afraid of his drifting away out of her life because she had not been born his sister. He was the only brother she had ever had, and he would always be her brother. Nothing could get him quite away from her, now that she was “growing nice” to him.

And yet she was a little proud about that. She would like him to acknowledge that she had always been nice, if he could only have found it out.

And this was precisely what Grahame was wishing to do, and to make her understand, only he knew he had some probation to work out first. She could not be expected to “forget the claws” with very sudden readiness.

XXIII

DRIFTWOOD

It is not to be supposed that there was nothing but waiting, or even keeping on in the harness of separate undertakings, all this winter time. There was social life, in which Biddy took pleasant part and found cordial welcome. Dr. Maclyn was not absolutely enslaved by his profession ; he could manage a few leisure evenings, and he and Biddy sometimes went to entertainments together.

Biddy would have "come out," probably, in due form at this time if Mrs. Forsythe had been at home and had had her way. Biddy was glad to escape this. Friends remembered that she was socially of age and entitled to notice. There were little teas and luncheons made for her out here at Overbrook, and Mrs. North gave a beautiful party for her in Mount Street. Everybody said it was far better than the magnificent thronged functions at the Topsyturvy or the Tilefields.

Mrs. North and the Henslees had made a dancing-room in each of their houses by throwing two or three rooms on one floor together and thus affording ample space for pleasant gatherings that were neither a scatter nor a jam. They liked better to give their young friends these enjoyments two or three times in a winter, comfortably, and in the true social spirit, than in one great smash subverting its own end. "We ask companies, not regiments," Mrs. Henslee said.

Of course I did not go to the dances, so I cannot take you to them, nor tell you all about their little incidents in a story which is simply my own reading and witness of things. But hearsay and inference, though not accepted in a court of law, are quite relevant and allowable in such pages as these, and at any rate I do not hesitate to put them in. Bits here and there came to me, of course, in talkings over and kind reports for my gratification; and I gathered easily that Bidy had no lack of "good times," meaning partners and general appreciation, and that she comported herself with a spirited but well-measured grace in

movement and conversation that was fresh and individual, yet quite within the lines of truly polite convention. If she did an odd thing, it was a departure from something that would better be departed from, and never a conspicuously erratic proceeding.

I could see that Dr. Maclyn was growing very proud of her.

"I think in a few years Bidy will be an authority on the right side in these things," he said to me.

He had been telling me of one of the girl's decided acts which touched a matter much needing to be righted, as we thought, and as many inside observers as well as outside hearers about society ways are constrained to confess.

It was not at Mrs. North's or Mrs. Henslee's. These things were not allowed to happen with them. It was at a larger and yet very select demonstration at one of the smaller halls.

Bidy was really a charming vision when she stood before me dressed for the evening. Her gown was of a pale green silken gauze, the stuff of which had narrow ribbon stripes running down it in shimmering rip-

ples, its length floating away in crisp lightness from her slender yet perfectly rounded figure; the corsage was delicately shirred; a bertha of fleecy lace fell cloudlike from her shoulders across her lovely bust; some water lilies with their green pads and dropping stems were caught into its fluffiness, and another cluster looped through her belt hung long from her side among the folds of her skirt like a chatelaine of flowers.

The lilies were not real, but of the veriest similitude, made at the Cheery Comrades' from models handed down ever since the time when Mrs. Harry Henslee, then Lilian Hawtree, had made the like and many other like beautiful art illustrations for Miss Esther Charlock.

The softly massed bright hair, which was Biddy's chief personal exterior charm, was thrust through by a long silver pin, whose head was a delicate spray-like ornament of tiniest clear crystals that quivered at the tips of invisible tremulous stems and scattered their sparkles among the gold-brown coils and waves like a sprinkle of water-drops upon the head of an Undine.

Her eyes were shining, not with the

mere self-pleased consciousness of the incomplete Undine nature, alive only to the natural and to her own joyous beauty in it, but with a sweet heart-gladness that she was fair in the sight of us two whom she loved, — Hildebrand and me. The two kinds of pleasedness are easily distinguished, and there was no mistaking hers. For when I exclaimed admiringly, and Grahame said quietly, "You are very lovely, Biddy," she glanced from one to the other with a suffusion of color, and a glint like the start of tears in the brilliance of her eyes, and her smile had a little trembling in it at the corners.

"I'm glad," she said simply, as her look rested upon Grahame. His eyes shone back into hers without a shadow of misapprehension; with a gladness in her just as she was — as he was coming so surely and so fast to know her.

After their carriage had rolled away I wondered to myself a little what he might possibly say to her in that long drive to Topthorpe. But he knew a great deal better than that, I instantly reflected. He would be far from confident enough. With

the whole evening and the return drive before them, and he her brotherly escort, he would precipitate nothing. But I did not see why it should not be coming soon, and I was glad, too, all by myself, as I crocheted half a blanket stripe and played two games of Patience before I went to bed at eleven o'clock.

It was an Easter party they had gone to ; Easter had come early ; it was Thursday in Easter week. The spring was early, too. It might not stay open, we knew very well. The idiosyncrasies of our New England climate are easily reckoned upon ; they are so sure to be uncertain. But everybody was enjoying balmy days and new spring odors now ; new gowns, also, and the revival of gay gatherings. Grahame and Bidly would have a lovely drive, simply in itself, through the beautiful park and along the riverside boulevard. The air was soft and the Easter moon was glorious.

But I was going to tell you of the little incident at the party. It was so like Bidly, and yet so softened from her old abruptness. She was like the beautiful season itself now, putting aside sharpness and inclemency and

everything cyclonic, and taking on quietly a new, gentle life, yet with all the vigor in it that gales or cloudbursts could signify turned to growth and bloom and promise of rich fruitage. How much she must have hidden that a few months could develop so absolute a change! It was truly as the winter hides for the sure coming of the spring.

Dancing was at its height in the brilliantly lighted, profusely decorated hall. Round after round, to captivating music, with talk and promenade between — we who do not go now know how it is, as we used to know it, but with all the intensification of present-day enlargement and lavishness in costume and accompaniment and high refinement of pleasure — had succeeded each other until nearly midnight and the supper time. Bidy had been constantly on the floor, besieged for dances, engaged from the beginning for the supper, — before the beginning, en route upon that happy drive, — but asked over and over if she were free; having what girls sometimes call a “time of their life,” which means rather a specimen time than an ex-

ception. Other girls, not made for times or times for them, sit back in corners.

A group of these — well dressed, bright looking until the tired expression crept over their faces and marked and fixed them as the unsuccessful — had gathered together by sympathetic attraction at one end of a line of chaperons in the semi-seclusion of some evergreens that filled a window recess and protected them a little from the obvious waiting for chances of a position more openly in evidence. They were making believe, I think likely, to be having a good time of their own, quite by choice, escaping perhaps from superfluous solicitations, with nevertheless a little restlessness of something like solicitude on their own part showing in glances outward, over shoulders or between the greenery.

Now and then a matron would come up and present a polite but laggard victim, who under the gentle but resolute compulsion would lead one of them out for a brief turn, or an anxious usher would do his best to stir some cosmic movement that might break up the constellation of fixed stars and set them in appreciable motion.

There were less complimentary epithets than "fixed stars" applied to them by some of the recalcitrants whose blame the fixedness was.

Girls and men, triumphantly paired, swept carelessly past the bevy of the unappropriated, and never stopped. Grahame Maclyn came and stayed awhile, took out two or three in succession, but refrained from a general too evident philanthropy. So for the most part the "wall-flowers" did their serving as background for the active scene, as those do who in other patient abidings stand and wait.

"It really is a shame," said one matron to another, "and all those wretched fellows loafing round the doors. They ought not to be given anything to eat."

"Or asked next time," said the other.

"It does not often happen," said a third more leniently, or perhaps with gentle sarcasm. "And some of them have excuse, poor things. They're shy, or not good dancers and popular with the girls, and know it. It is as bad over there as here, perhaps."

Biddy had just finished a promenade with

one partner, and another — Paul Dixon, a desirable of the desirables — had come up to claim her.

“Suppose we sit it out,” she said. “I have danced so much.”

“Nothing I'd like better,” was the reply. He gave her his arm, and they walked off up the room.

At the back of the hall were two ante-rooms, with a corridor between that led to the supper hall, into which the smaller apartments also opened. These were favorite resorts for sitters-out; cool, and not so dazzlingly lighted as the dancing-room; pretty and fragrant with plants and flowers. Chaperons, one or two at a time, would usually be found there, quietly chatting with each other away from the madding crowd, and there would almost always be two or three young couples discreetly scattered, to be discreetly matronized. A small stream from the general current of promenaders invariably tended toward each of these three doorways.

“There are some nice seats over there,” said Biddy sweetly, nodding toward the green recess in the side wall.

"Among the driftwood!" ejaculated her partner, with eyebrows slightly lifted.

Biddy slipped her hand from off his arm, and looked him in the face, her own brows raised in simple question. "I do not understand," she said.

Her companion gave an embarrassed laugh.

"Don't they drift — the — er — unoccupied?"

"I thought the driftwood was all down there." She made a little disdainful motion with her fan over her shoulder toward the groups of young masculine loiterers in the doorways. "Don't they drift — the — er — ineligible?"

Then Paul Dixon laughed with spontaneous good will. It was the best way out of it.

"As a general thing, I don't like Antis," Biddy remarked gravely. "But I don't know that I may not try to get up an Anti-Drift League. Do you think it would work?"

"As how?"

"Well, if all the nice girls — it need n't be an Anti, after all — would agree to drift too, as long as there was any drifting ;

not to dance until there was a good general asking, and corners and doorways were empty and the floor full; or would take to sitting out themselves with the — er — unoccupied, when they were evidently left over — without partners, of course. How do you think it would work, Mr. Dixon?" she repeated.

"I think anything you started would work, Miss Forsythe. And if you drift over there now, I think half the room will come after you before the next promenade is over. We'll go and try it."

And so they did; and so it turned out.

It was no careless or triumphant contrast that Bidy presented to the little squad of the unappropriated. They were girls she knew, and she came right in among them and to them, her escort with her perforce. She had not intended a sitting-out tête-à-tête, and that Mr. Paul Dixon found out distinctly. He rose to the occasion gallantly, greatly amused indeed by her tact and determination.

The driftwood lighted up, and showed pretty colors. A merry conversation started. Bidy led off. She had some "awfully

funny" little story to tell. Somebody else caught the spark, and "chipped in," as Dixon told it afterward. There was plenty of animation and laughing in less than five minutes. Other couples, straying by, were curious, and stopped to see and hear. They remembered that these unnoticed girls were of themselves, and suddenly had something to say to them. The most desirable and popular fellow in the room, and the most brilliant girl, not unapproachable in a conventional separateness for the time being, but merged in a merry gathering open to any accession, could not put themselves in such circumstance without joining opportunity to attraction. As the dance ended, the group enlarged. It is easy to gather a crowd. There was a drift of a new sort; it was the trend of the assembly. In the midst were the whilom "sticks," unbent from their stiffness, broken up from their forlorn cohesion, getting engaged at last for dances; for Biddy seized her occasion, made introductions, managed exchanges of talk and shifting of places; and Paul Dixon, taking his cue chivalrously, led the way with his own requests, and by look and manner, if not

direct word, showed that the thing in hand was to get this little raft of the stranded out for a share in the swim.

"*Nothing* was ever better done," said a social dictatress who had watched the clever campaign.

"She shows quality," another replied. "She'll do."

"She says you fellows are the driftwood," Paul Dixon went and told the doorkeepers.

"She's a peach, anyway," they declared. "Now we're rested we'll do the polite, — to the" —

"Don't dare to say the other thing," interrupted Paul Dixon forcibly.

During the after-supper dances there was no driftwood anywhere.

"Why didn't I ever half know her before?" exclaimed Grahame, when he had told me the whole story, which had buzzed round the ballroom after the "Forsythe coup."

"I had seen it in outline," he said, "for I had Biddy in my eye, and I joined in with the rest in time to comprehend what was up ;

but Dixon and the others made consecutive history of it in ten minutes after it happened. It will be a tradition of the season, Anti-Drift League and all. She is fine at a charge, and she carries the position, Miss Joanna!"

"Whether in the face of trade or fashion," I added.

"Or a raging, roaring automobile," Grahame subjoined.

"Or a prejudice and misconception," I returned gently.

"Do you think she would care to know she had demolished that?" he asked me eagerly.

"I don't quite dare to tell you all I think," I answered him.

Then the shuttlecock dropped between us, and we did not toss it any more.

But I think Dr. Maclyn was tolerably satisfied for the time being with the hits that we had made.

It was only a bit of side practice that he had tried with me. The match game was not ours, and I had not meant to take a hand in any such, as I have repeatedly declared.

XXIV

FINE: AND FIT

It was only a week after this that the letter came from Hastings telling of Mrs. Redwood's death. Grahame brought it over and read it to me.

Biddy was out. Mr. Forsythe was here, waiting for her. He came pretty often; he was greatly interested in the girl, and kept in close touch with all her plans.

Also, he talked to me about that mining property. He was still holding back from her the information about it, but a man has to tell things to somebody. The more secret they are, the more need he has of a confidant, and I was just nearly enough concerned.

"Biddy is likely to be a very rich woman," he said. "That will alter the shape of things. A widow holds no right in wild lands, and the shares were distinctly left to Biddy. My brother felt sure they would eventually come up again. But I would not have any of them know it yet, for all the mines in Colorado."

It was just as he had said this that Grahame came in with his news.

Mrs. Forsythe was all alone, except for the neighborhood and kind attention of some English friends. She was going up to London with them presently, — that meant after the funeral, — and would remain there for a time, to rest and consult an oculist. Her eyes had grown very troublesome. She had stared at the sea too much. They had been on the beach every day for hours, as long as Mrs. Redwood could bear the fatigue of her wheeled chair.

“Poor mother has had a hard time,” said Grahame. “I shall cable to her that I will come across and bring her home.”

“Better wait till you understand her wishes,” said Uncle Geoff. “She is in London now, of course. You have n’t even her address there, I suppose.”

“I have her bankers’.”

“True. Of course. And you need not follow your message in hot haste. Let her have time to consider, and reply in full. But repeat what you said before, — that you will only wait till called for.”

“I think she ought to come home. You

see, I cannot go over for a long stay, and I could not leave her alone again."

"She may not be alone. She may make plans. Just wait and hear. You can't exactly order things for her. Hold yourself at her disposal; that is all she would expect or wish."

Grahame folded up his letter and went away. He looked troubled and uncertain.

Mr. Forsythe did not wait, after all, for Biddy to come home. He had an engagement to dinner, he said.

Dr. Kinsman came in after tea, with a long face.

I had told Biddy about the letter, of course.

"Poor belle-mère!" she had said. "She is really all alone now." And she had eaten her supper very silently.

"He thinks he must go to his mother," Dr. Kinsman informed us. "It is a great pity."

I was not sure whether he meant merely a professional pity. I thought it might be possible, as to that, to spare him for a few weeks.

"He may not be gone long," I said. "He may bring his mother home."

"It is a terrible pity," Dr. Kinsman repeated.

I am afraid my suggestion induced the repetition. Yes, it did all seem very regrettable, just now, interrupting everything.

While I was thinking, Biddy spoke. We had lingered in our seats at the table while Martha cleared away, and Biddy had said nothing until now that all was removed, and the pantry door shut.

"He need not go, Dr. Kinsman. I am going myself."

The words came as quietly as if they meant no more than an errand into the next room.

The doctor whistled. "That *would* cut the knot," he said.

And again I did not know precisely what he meant.

"Don't say anything about it, Miss Biddy, until some further word comes. Nobody can go before that," he advised her.

"But he need not be thinking about it. I can do it as well as not. People are always going. I can have company at any time. Miss Susan Inchley and Rose are to

sail on the twenty-seventh, and there'll be lots more, right along, all summer. There are yard-long lists by every steamer. It is n't anything at all to do."

"You're a little trump, as you always are. But don't play your card yet. I have reasons."

"I'm not playing cards."

And then Dr. Kinsman saw that he had chosen too apt an illustration. It was too nearly showing his own hand.

"Make your move, then. There's always a best time for things. Be patient, little girl. Wait and see. I think Maclyn would like that best."

She looked at him as if she would like to know why. He "had reasons." Of what sort?

Whatever occurred to her for answer, she said no more just then. To me, after the doctor had left and we had gone upstairs, she remarked ambiguously, "I don't see what he has to do with it."

"Perhaps not. But I guess he knows. We had better take his advice."

That referred it to Dr. Kinsman, and she did not contradict. I should not wonder if

she had left it open to mean either doctor — or both.

“I shall speak to Uncle Geoffrey, anyway,” she declared, in conclusion, and went off into her room with a quite lofty and determined set of her little head. She even forgot to kiss me good-night.

I spoke about it myself to Mr. Geoffrey Forsythe.

“Do you think it is really necessary — or advisable?” I asked him.

“I think it’s a pretty fine thing for her to do, anyway,” he said.

“Pretty in act — and fine — in policy?” I inquired, for it dawned upon me what Dr. Kinsman’s “cutting the knot” might have meant. I began to see through these two older men and their machinations.

“Exactly so. But it does n’t occur to her. It is fineness, not finesse. That’s what makes it both fine and fit,” he answered.

I said no more, for we are never definite in these discussions, and I generally rested content in whatever Uncle Geoffrey seemed to countenance.

Biddy left the subject as it had dropped, but she busied herself with her wardrobe

and her boxes. She sorted things, and laid them into trunks. Behind the alcove curtains these stood with open lids, and received their allotments of whatever she came to in her orderings that should either go abroad or be put in safe tidiness to leave behind. She had interviews with Shawe at his cottage, and she was very loving with her dogs.

She did not look very happy. She did not talk much about anything. She chiefly concerned herself with these personal arrangements and with matters at the Hive requiring provision in case of her absence.

I asked her once what she thought the Hummers would do without her.

“Hum,” she answered me. “I’m leaving all things right, and Mrs. Lippitt is just cut out for a queen bee, as to the staying in one spot and keeping the workers busy. And I shall be sending home patterns and things. I shall be picking up something all the time. I’m going to travel for the establishment.”

But I knew that “all the time” looked hard to her, an indefinite duration; and

that she must be aware, subconsciously at any rate, and with a pain she probably refused to analyze, that she was leaving other things which she could not provide for nor control; that it could not be foreseen whether her life, on her return, would piece itself without misjoin to what it would break from now. I knew she was making a sacrifice magnanimous in an uncertainty that she would not even consider, and that the "fine policy" side of it, as Uncle Geoff had said, never occurred to her. I knew she was doing as purely brave a thing as a woman ever finds herself called to do.

I did not doubt that Grahame Maclyn would feel strongly the direct beauty of her action, and that it would undo with him half of his hard knot; I only wished he might guess as I did the depth of its generosity and all that it might mean for him.

The expected letters came from London. Mrs. Forsythe was settled in quiet rooms in Euston Square, just round from Bedford Place. Her English friends were in Gower Street; they came to see her often.

She had seen Dr. Ormswell; he advised rest for a while, and then some German

baths; there was a great oculist at Wiesbaden, to whom he would give her letters. Dr. Paganstäcker was a wonderful man, and as kind as wonderful. She thought she should go to Germany about the first of June. She had found an excellent English maid, who had traveled, and would go with her. I think she purposely refrained from anything like self-commiseration, but mentioned the maid in a way that made apparent the fact that hired service was all that she could command.

It was now the twentieth of April. The next morning after this letter came, Biddy went into Topthorpe to see her Uncle Geoffrey.

When she came home she announced to me, "Uncle Geoffrey is to engage my passage by the Ivernia on the twenty-seventh. I am all ready — but saying good-by — dear Miss Joanna."

Her voice trembled, and she came around the table to me and kissed me. It was as much to hide her face as for the kiss, I thought, that she came close.

"You must not say a word. You *know* I am doing right — at last," she told me.

It appeared afterward that Dr. Maclyn had been to see Mr. Geoffrey Forsythe that same day.

"I shall sail on the twenty-seventh," he had said to that gentleman.

"That is what Biddy means to do," Uncle Geoff answered him coolly. "She was here early this morning. I have secured her state-room. Perhaps you had better not hurry. The *Ivernia* is full. And Biddy is quite right. Mrs. Forsythe will require a companion for some time. She will not expect you. I don't believe she will want you. She knows your place is here. Biddy knows her place is there. She has looked ahead; her mind has been made up from the beginning. She will have company to London,—Miss Susan Inchley and her niece. She would not talk about it, for fear it should be disputed and argued."

In his first surprise Grahame Maclyn could not speak a word: It was all so overwhelming, and it was all so reasonably true.

"I don't see how I can consent to it," he said at last.

"I don't see how you can prevent it," replied Uncle Geoff.

“At least I can have something to say about it,” Grahame rejoined, and rose to leave the office.

“I hope you will say the right thing,” said Mr. Geoffrey Forsythe.

XXV

CABLEGRAMS— AND TABLE-TIPS

THERE was a lively exchange of cablegrams during the next forty-eight hours.

Biddy dictated this to her Uncle Geoffrey :

“ I am coming to you, ma mère. Ivernia. Twenty-seventh.”

“ Might make three words of it,” Uncle Geoffrey had said.

“ I want all the words, Uncle Geoff,” she answered. “ They are none too many for what I mean.”

Uncle Geoff sent the dispatch.

The answer came : —

“ Message received. Most welcome.”

But the next evening Dr. Maclyn sent this : —

“ Plans somewhat changed. Am writing fully.”

That which had happened between was this : —

Grahame came straight to the cottage from the train that first afternoon. The

day was lovely, one of those that come up from the south before the icebergs start downward ; when the summer wind has its innings on its way toward the Arctics, whence it will send down the frozen masses to linger along past Labrador and Newfoundland, making the great ocean chills from which the easterly blasts will rush in to fill the spaces left open by the rising of the sweet, warm air for the flank charge of the boreal battalions.

The lawn was sprinkled with crocuses, yellow, purple, and white, with delicate veins of color. Among them robins were tripping, halting, throwing up their proud little heads, and tripping again, taking possession of their summer estate. A great bed of lilies-of-the-valley along the hedge was coming into bloom. Violets were breathing up their spring incense from beds under the windows, and lilac trees were tossing their whitening plumes. The whole house and all about it was sweet with a tide of very early spring.

Biddy and I were out, wandering up and down, our hands full of blossoms. The old apple tree was showing streaks of pink and

white in its swelling buds. We strolled slowly down to the old trysting place. Possibly to-morrow we might have a furnace fire again and sit within closed doors, but that could not spoil to-day. To-day was the true thing, whatever "error" of nature might interfere to-morrow. Summer was coming and this was the beginning.

Grahame Maclyn came down the pleasant slope and overtook us. This was a happy, fortuitous arrangement. I could make myself conveniently distant a bit, if I saw occasion, and yet not leave them "p'intedly," as the darkies say.

He did not give me much time for movement. He came straight to Biddy and ignored me utterly. He caught her by both her hands and held her. Her flowers fell from her own lighter grasp and strewed the ground. Neither of them minded.

"Biddy!" he said, "I've come to thank you, though I don't see how I can let you do this. It is *my* duty."

"I don't wonder you can't see mine in it all at once," she said, lifting soft eyes to his eager ones. "But I think it is time for me to be a little daughterly. I've put it

off long enough. You can't stop me," she continued with pretty obstinacy, "not even if you use the claws."

She smiled, but for all that and the obstinacy there was a quiver in both voice and smile.

I moved away a little, not with evidence, and truly not altogether out of hearing.

It was very still out there. Robins were tripping and feeding; over in the Forsythe field a song sparrow was trilling its sweet cadence — that was all.

"Biddy!"

There was a whole world of restrained utterance in the pause he made after her name.

"I don't believe we had better talk about it," she said gently. "It can't be changed."

"I *must* talk! You must hear me this time. Everything must be changed — everything is different! I want your forgiveness, and to 'begin again,' as we said when we were children. You are sweetness and goodness all the way through," he went on impetuously, "to the very *you* of you. I know you now, and I know I have been beastly. I've always misjudged you, misin-

terpreted you. And yet — I've loved you all the time, Biddy!"

"Why, Grim!"

I heard that, though I had walked slowly a good bit up the garden path. And then I stepped quicker and went quite round behind the currant hedge. Neither of them noticed.

They found me in the house when they came in. It was very nearly an hour after, an hour that had had a life story in it. Did n't I know about it as well as if I had heard every word they had said?

They came and told me, nevertheless.

"She means to do real daughtering, she says; and there is only one way for her to do it."

That was how Grahame put it. And contradictory Biddy did not contradict.

She took refuge in the previous question.

"I've got to go, all the same, remember. She expects me; she wants me; and it may be for a good while."

"There is no immediate hurry. It may mean a later steamer, that is all. We must hear from her again, when she has learned of this. I shall send another cable, and then write. We want a word from her."

That was true. It struck Bidly with sudden comprehension, perhaps, of more and different than Grahame meant. She could not take her whole welcome for granted. A shadow crossed her happy face. Would the belle-mère be pleased? She remembered that there might be much to do — to undo — before she should have learned the certainty of a full-hearted acceptance.

“I see,” she said, with quiet yielding. “I have got to make her want me in a new way, and it may take a good while.” She repeated her own words about the absence and the distance, with an interpretation of a different farawayness and long time. “I will leave it all to her and you. The arrangement, I mean; the fact remains the same — unless she forbids.”

Grahame's face lighted up at that submission of “arrangement,” as if he took it in some way of his own.

“Forbids? What?” he asked quickly. “She will forbid nothing. But I will write first.”

His voice rang with happy confidence.

She had put it all into his hands with a wonderful, lovely surrender. That he would

take it into them, and that they were capable, I did not doubt.

He said he would not stay with us longer then, but go in town, find Uncle Geoff at the Kremlin, and send the dispatch, just intimating a delay, and announcing the explanatory letter.

He went away buoyantly.

Biddy and I took our tea together in a kind of beatific abstraction. Martha Blunt waited, *ex officio*, and in expectancy, looking from one to the other of us as she handed cups. I knew the story was in our faces, apart from the possibility of kitchen windows and garden glimpses.

“That’s the surrup, ma’m,” she said indulgently, as I took up a little silver pitcher and was about to pour from it into my tea.

There was a tone of fine toleration about her in voice and manner. She was bearing with me under the circumstances, until I should recollect and respect her rights.

“I will take another roll, Martha,” I said a few moments after, with supreme calmness.

“Them’s griddle muffins,” the hand-
maiden replied. “I hope they’re good.”

I answered absently, "I don't know." Then added hastily, "Of course. They always are, Martha."

Biddy could not help a little laugh, and Martha retreated, to have her own chuckle in the pantry.

Biddy went upstairs early, giving me her good-night kiss with a tender lingering. We could not talk much, and silence was burdened with the much we had to say.

Martha Blunt broke through that which was between herself and me, as we were shutting up the house together.

"It's easy to see what's happened," she said.

"Not quite happened, Martha," I replied; "only happening — just as it ought to — in the most beautiful and natural way."

I was really thinking only of the sweet dutifulness and the manly generosity which had brought things to pass; not in the least of any self-exoneration to which I had been addicted under Martha's habitual compulsions.

But she caught me up.

"You make me think of my Aunt Jerushy Jane Billin's," she said. "You've heard of the old table-tippin's, I s'pose."

“Of course I remember them.”

“Well, we got consid’rable excited about ’em down to Billin’sville, and we used to have settin’s at our house and at Aunt Jerushy Jane’s, when I was a little girl. I remember one night when a light-stand walked all over the room and tried to go upstairs; got one leg on the first step, but somehow could n’t fetch up the others. Three was confusin’ to the sperits, prob’ly; they’d all learned down here to walk on two, and it took time then to manage gettin’ upstairs. Anyhow the livin’ folks got tired and stopped. And then they had a kind of honesty meetin’; brought each other up to confession, like.

“‘Did n’t you push?’ says marm to par. ‘No, not a mite. Ef I had, ’t would ’a’ gone out the winder an’ up the hill.’ ‘Somebody did, a mighty,’ said Uncle Ben. ‘Was it you, Jerushy Jane?’ ‘Well no, I don’t think I reely *pushed*,’ says she. ‘I only p’inted my fingers pretty strong the way I wanted the table to go.’”

She snapped the last window catch, and left the moral to my conscience.

XXVI

UNCLE GEOFF TAKES THE RISK

“Do not disappoint me.”

This was the message that answered Grahame's the next day.

But the letter in full was not written until the second day after.

Mr. Geoffrey Forsythe came out to see Biddy, and then he went and called on Dr. Kinsman.

“Is there any earthly reason why they should not be married and go out together?” he demanded of that gentleman. “There is plenty of time between this and June.”

“No earthly reason why they should not, and every heavenly reason why they should,” Dr. Kinsman answered.

“Only he could not come back and leave his wife indefinitely,” said Uncle Geoff.

“Being his wife would make all the difference. There would be no question of that once the main questions were settled.

Earthly reasons would no further interfere, and heavenly ones would have all their own way. Besides, he need not hurry back. We can make him useful on the other side for a while. Germany is alive with research work. North can give him letters to Berlin. It will do him all the good in the world, and us, too. Then, too, I don't believe madame will stay very long after this. She'll have duty back again when her family is all made up, perhaps. Depends on how she takes the making."

"I'll take the risk of that," said Uncle Geoff.

And then the two came down upon Grahame with their heavenly and earthly reasons. The young man's conviction was not difficult. The coming down, I think, was of the sort when step or seat proves nearer than one had calculated. All he wanted of their reasons was the strengthening of his own in persuading Biddy.

So the letter in full was not written until the second day.

"Do you think I ought?" the girl asked me. "It is all so — I won't say the stereo-

typed 'sudden,' " — she put that in with a quick, nervous laugh, — "but so strange, so startling."

"So Biddy Forsythe-y?"

"I've left off being Biddy Forsythe."

"Then is n't it the best thing you can do to take the other name?"

I treated it in this way with an instinct that so taking it, and not being startled or in the least bit timid about it myself, was the wisest course with her.

"They all three say it is what had better be," I continued. "I would n't undertake to give judgment otherwise. But certainly it unties the knots."

"By tying the tighter one," and she laughed in the same short, quick way again, and then turned grave.

"Do you think I am fit, Miss Joanna?" She put the question with eyes fixed on me in a strong earnestness.

"I don't suppose any of us are ever completely fit for anything. The things that come to us are the making fit. And this has come to you. You and Grahame have your life to live — together. You have promised it. It begins right here and now,

whatever circumstance of it you may delay. And you told him you would put the circumstances in his hands."

She and Grahame had a long talk in the afternoon, and that night he wrote and mailed his letter.

It ran thus, "in part," as other reporters say:—

"Biddy and I are going to be married, and come out to you together. We want you to be very glad. There was no time for longer notice. The wedding and the sailing will be on the eleventh *prochaine*,—Grandmamma Maclyn's 'bobolink day,' don't you remember? Whether the birds are precise about it or not, it will be our day, and a pretty anniversary to keep. Send us a kind word by cable."

All they got in reply was this:—

"Greatly astonished. Must take time to realize."

A pained look came over Grahame's face as he read the disappointing slip, which he had brought over to the cottage unopened. For the first time, I think, he felt distinctly the serious flaw in his mother's nature. He had called Biddy to him, and their eyes

caught the brief line together as she leaned against his shoulder.

Then it was she put aside all her own feeling, her pride, her quick sense of rebuff, and spoke with the one simple intent to make the best of it to him.

"We can't wonder much, Grim. It means everything to her, and it has come so suddenly. It is as good as *I* deserve — yet. But we will *make* her glad — as glad as the bobolinks."

"My bonny Bee!" and he clasped her close.

"'Transmigrations of Indur!'" she exclaimed, laughingly, though the "drops stood in her e'en." "But bees sting sometimes."

"Not those who have the care of them, and who *understand*."

"Never mind," said Uncle Geoffrey, when they told him. "She'll have a fortnight or more to realize in. And there are other things to realize. I've got a cablegram to send her, on my own account. I promise you it will all be lovely by the time you arrive."

XXVII

SO 'S A HEN

IN the fortnight that followed Mrs. Forsythe may have been realizing, but it was like a dream to us.

“Don’t mind your bonny rags,” said Uncle Geoffrey. “London and Paris are full of them, and the dame will just enjoy fitting you out. Leave some of the fun for her.”

They thought he counted largely upon her pleasure, I could see, for they said little on that point. But I waited with private delight the outcome of Uncle Geoffrey’s secret. I wondered when he would make his move.

There must be a wedding dress, and there were the invitations to the quiet, limited affair it was to be; there were calls to receive, and heaps of notes to be written. Wedding presents tumbled in; that rush was not to be avoided; there was all the packing; and the brief engagement claiming all that an engagement means crowded into its eighteen days. There was hardly time for

all the joy ; there certainly was none for any question or foreboding.

Dr. Christieson married them beautifully, in the little Church of the Holy Benediction. Only real friends were present, only the chosen called. It was in the morning ; the steamer was to sail at half-past three.

The day was perfect ; a bobolink did sing in the orchard ; its notes, in a most gleeful hurry, bubbled and trilled on the mellow air just as Biddy, Uncle Geoff, and I went out from the house to the carriage.

Uncle Geoff gave her away, of course ; Constance Meridon, Alix Brentway, and the two Henslees were bridesmaids ; it was all done in a sweet order, yet nothing seemed merely prescriptive ; there was a freshness of expression in every particular, from the robe-like simplicity of the bride's beautiful lace dress — unspoiled by needless intricacies of style and stitchery, its exquisite pattern of small rosebuds and leaves showing its clear tracery in the straight-sweeping folds over snowy shimmer of soft white silk — to the movement and conduct of each external detail of the occasion.

With her hand lightly resting on her uncle's arm, she walked sedately and deliberately, as in act of her own, accepting countenance but not requiring support, with no effect of purposed lingering, but contrarily with the steady intent of her coming, up the aisle to where Grahame awaited her at the chancel.

The bridesmaids and ushers were grouped on either side. There were no picture hats nor big bouquets; breast-knots of roses for the girls and boutonnières of carnations for the men were the badges; a flower or two carried lightly in the maidens' hands, as if just picked up or gathered, served against awkwardness; there was nothing to be held for the bride; her small loose bunch of lilies and green leaves was looped to her belt by a narrow white ribbon, and fell at her side when her hand was wanted.

It was no rehearsed performance; you felt that these persons were truly "gathered together in the sight of God," and not merely or chiefly in the face of a human company, for a holy marriage joining. And so, with strong and gently clear enunciation of the vows, they two were made one.

The music ! I don't know what it was, for I am not versed in music ; but I know there was no conventional wedding march. I think it was improvisation, both before and after. A sweetly solemn tenderness of measured chords, with play of happy chimes and cadences between, accompanied their entering footsteps ; and when they went down the aisle again it was like an outburst of dawn-music, bird-songs, brook-ripples, the wind-rustle among fresh leaves, all the gladness of a beautiful oncoming day, quickening, swelling, multiplying, responding, then toning down and slowing to a more measured rhythm, the acceptance of an assured, tranquil felicity ; at last, with beautiful modulation, resolving into and rolling forth the grand old strain of the sublime doxology, —

“ Praise God, from whom all blessings flow ;
Praise Him, all creatures here below ;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host ;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

The company stood ; voices joined utterance ; the bridal party paused in the porch ; the words, in gathering volume of sound, poured forth upon the air. Hour and act

were hallowed ; hearts were upraised ; we went away as from some festival of Heaven.

We had a pretty little earthly breakfast at the cottage.

Rex and Imp were invited inside to-day ; indeed, they had been at the church. With white favors fastened to their collars, they had decorously accompanied the bridal carriage, and stayed obediently on guard beside it at the church steps while the ceremony went on within ; then, as if they understood that solemnity was over, that their mistress had come safely through whatever ordeal it had been, and that congratulation and rejoicing were appropriate, had barked and bounded all the way home.

After the breakfast came the brief interval for changing into traveling costume. Then bride and groom were among us again, she very lovely in her soft gray suit, on her head a small gray toque of braided straw, with a single long gray ostrich plume curling around the brim.

There was no burlesque of joke and trickery when they set off ; they did not have to scramble out of the way ; there was no throwing of old shoes or rice. " If any-

body does it, it will be on penalty of broken friendship," Biddy had proclaimed. All was earnest and sweet to the very end. Nothing made her bridehood annoyingly conspicuous.

A few of us went to East Tophthorpe to see them off, but there was no demonstration other than was making all around among groups of parting friends with their kindly speedings and farewells. Only in the large, handsome deck stateroom there were flowers and books and dainties, and steamer letters tucked away for gradual discovery, to put them in mind of us all the way across, and make us at home feel that we were still cheering them off and over.

A cloud of waving handkerchiefs whitened over deck and pier as the great ship swung off into the channel, and headed down the harbor for the bay and the great sea.

It was meant for mutual gay salute and heartening, but we touched our handkerchiefs quickly to moist eyes as we turned away.

Martha Blunt and I drove home together pretty quietly. Out on the long stretch of the avenue she hardly said a word. Com-

ing into home neighborhood, she was apparently taken up with her own dignities, looking out on this side and that to see who was abroad to observe her conveyance as a chief participant in wedding honors. I noticed she sat well forward on her seat, keeping herself carefully in evidence.

But when we reached the cottage and came in, she resumed suddenly her old manner and speech, I think to cover and thrust away something that with us both might have been a little too pathetic to be spoken.

“Well!” she said, pulling off her gloves and sitting plumply down in the hall, before laying aside the rest of her importance and descending to her place in the kitchen, “Mrs. Forsythe’s cat has got Mrs. Forsythe’s chicken. That’s settled — just as it was before.”

“The best has happened that could happen,” I replied, ignoring the ignominious allusion. “I shall miss my Bidy, but she is taken out of my charge, safely and — providentially.”

“So’s a hen,” quoted Martha Blunt stolidly, resorting to the ancient slang that fitted the occasion.

“And it *happened* in the ordered course

of things, Martha Blunt," I insisted, "whatever your Aunt Jerusha Jane may have done about the table-tipping. I could n't have helped it if I had tried."

"No more 'n you did," said Martha concisely, rectifying my grammar.

"Martha! I wish you would stop saying that. I *did* — *not* — *meddle*. I only did the best I could with things that were laid upon me. I take no credit. Likewise, if anybody objects, I'm perfectly clear in my conscience."

"So 's a hen," reiterated Martha.

Mr. Geoffrey Forsythe came out to Overbrook three days later.

"Louisa feels better, eyes and all," he said to me, laying down his hat. "I thought you would like to know."

"You have sent the cablegram?"

"Yes. This is a copy." He produced a penciled card from his waistcoat pocket.

I took it and read: —

"Double congratulations. Young couple happily off to you. Mining shares up to 140 and advancing. Land opening up. Means lots of money for our Bee. Say nothing at present. She does not know."

“What a long telegram! But don't you mean to tell her? And you think *she* won't?” I exclaimed and questioned mixedly, in a breath.

He drew his, with raised eyebrows and a quizzical smile, and answered in due sequence:—

“It was worth while, and not so long as her answer. That was reckless. Yes; all in good time. And—no, she won't. She's shrewd enough to catch on. Family relations are to be established first, independently of money matters. This is the beginning.”

He handed me the printed message. It *was* reckless, worded with as absolute disregard of brevity and economy as a government dispatch under the most compelling public circumstances.

“Hearty thanks. The first news was a stunning surprise, but I have been rejoicing over it more and more. It was what I had always wished, but latterly given up hoping for, and almost changed my mind. Deeply grateful for all your good offices. Am expecting them eagerly. Shall probably shorten stay in Europe and return with

them. There are very good oculists in America."

"Well, I don't know!" cried Miss Persistent Prattle. "They say it's the unexpected happens, so I suppose we may always be expecting it will. We're all liable to death and matrimony,—you and I and Maria Briggs as much as anybody, I dare say. I hope you feel prepared, Joanna."

Persistent Prattle dares say anything. I told her so.

POSTSCRIPT

As were going to be a printed book, read by all men, and especially of women, I might not put in this postscript at all, or at least might direct it to be set in very small type.

And yet, what should I do that for? Why should I either suppress or tuck it in as if I did not want it to be noticed?

I gloried on the first page; why should I not glory on the last?

Six months after the end of Biddy's episodes, a wonderful one happened with me.

Mr. Geoffrey Forsythe asked me to be his wife.

He is the finest man I ever knew, but I am forty-six years old, and he is fifty-four.

I told him it was too late.

"Not if we have come to it," he said. "Nothing is ever too late that is real and right. It is not our fault that we did not find each other sooner; but we must make the best of that."

"We might never have found each other

in this world," I argued, if that were argument.

"What then? We should have in the next. Times and seasons are not for us to decide. We must begin where we are bid, even if it were at the eleventh hour. And it is not. It is just high noon with us, — the hour of the day and the day of the life for a marriage."

Every word he said was strong and beautiful to my hearing. And so we were engaged, and we waited only for the rest of the family to get home for the wedding.

Biddy wrote that it must not be otherwise. "Ma-mère is delighted," she said. She had dropped the "belle-mère" and taken to the nearer appellation ever since she had discovered that she could be daughterly for the very sake of the daughterliness, and for that of the motherhood that would receive it as meant for itself.

"She says you have been the making of the family, and that it is only fair you should come in. We shall be so jolly on Forsythe Hill, all in a row (which will never get pronounced as in cow), and the Hummers at the end of it. Grahame is

going to build right next you, just over the hedge, where Rex and Imp used to get through. How we all have invaded you, dear Miss Joanna !”

“I told you so ! ‘O my prophetic soul, my uncle !’” exclaimed and quoted Persistent Prattle. “Are you going to be married in your cap, Joanna ?”

It was queer how she always brought up the very thing that was absurdly and provokingly in my own mind. I *had* asked myself that same little ridiculous question, and it had bothered me a bit. I had been as sure of myself, when I had settled into that confession of confirmed maidenhood and elderliness, as ever a widow had been in her conventional covering — considerably surer than the average, indeed, of my own age or under.

But little things as well as large are settled for us, or changed, when that comes to be the requisite. Biddy brought me, among other things, the loveliest little point-lace head-scarf, just to lay lightly on the top of my hair, as anybody, old or young, who has hair, could wear it, and Mr. Forsythe

gave me a diamond star as a pin for it. I did not have any engagement diamond ; I would rather wait for the plain wedding ring that means the whole, as we had waited, not knowing, through the dazzle time of youth and sparkle for the calm fulfillment that was to be.

How did Martha Blunt take it ?

I did not dare to face her with it in the ordinary way of our mutual relation and condition. I could not, when we were just by ourselves, as usual, tell her of it as I would tell her of the intended entertainment of a visitor. I begged Mr. Forsythe, who had always been very cordially appreciative and recognizant of her, to make the announcement.

So as we sat together the next afternoon but one after there had been anything to announce, and Martha came in at early dusk with the lamp, he spoke.

“We have some news to tell you, Martha.”

“Maybe, sir,” responded Martha, respectfully permitting the statement. But the two words held plainly their significance that

there was little need to call it "news." She was as well prepared beforehand as the daily papers are with speeches not yet made and descriptions of gowns yet to be worn.

Mr. Forsythe met her on her own ground. It saved him from any awkwardness, if any had been possible to him.

"Well, we hope you approve. We want your good word, Martha."

Martha stood still a moment, looking from one to the other of us. I could see from her expression that she realized I had escaped in a measure from her old audacity into a strong protection, but also that she did not mean to succumb too suddenly. That was not it, either. There was something better and tenderer in her face than that.

"My word's this, then," she said. "The Lord seems to have taken his full time about it, but He's made a first-rate good job of it at last."

And she retreated precipitately into her pantry, where I knew she cried a little, while we laughed softly in a way not incongruous with such kindly tears.

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